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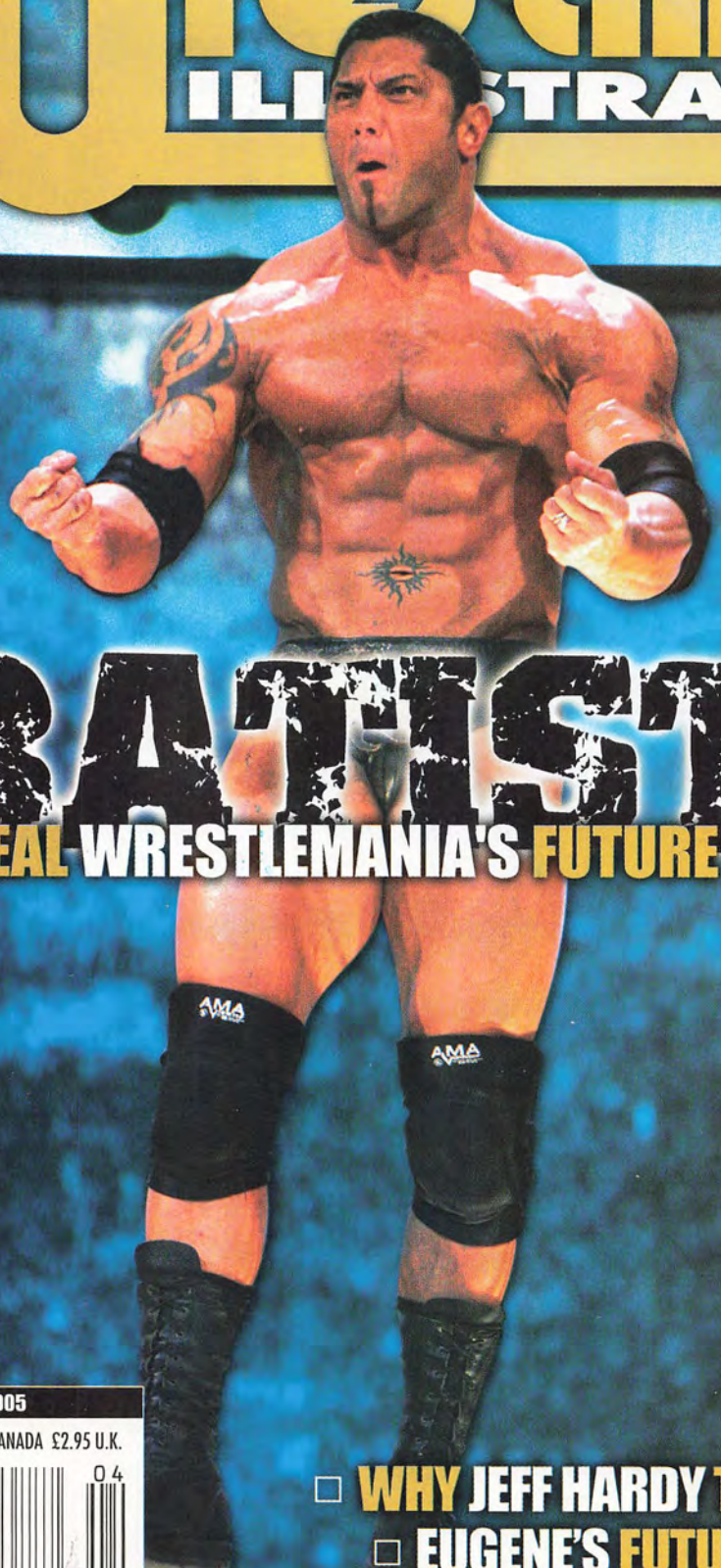

BATISTA

CAN HE STEAL WRESTLEMANIA'S FUTURE FROM ORTON?

ALSO

- WHY JEFF HARDY TERRIFIES TNA
- EUGENE'S FUTURE IN DOUBT?
- PRESS CONFERENCE: JBL

APRIL 2005

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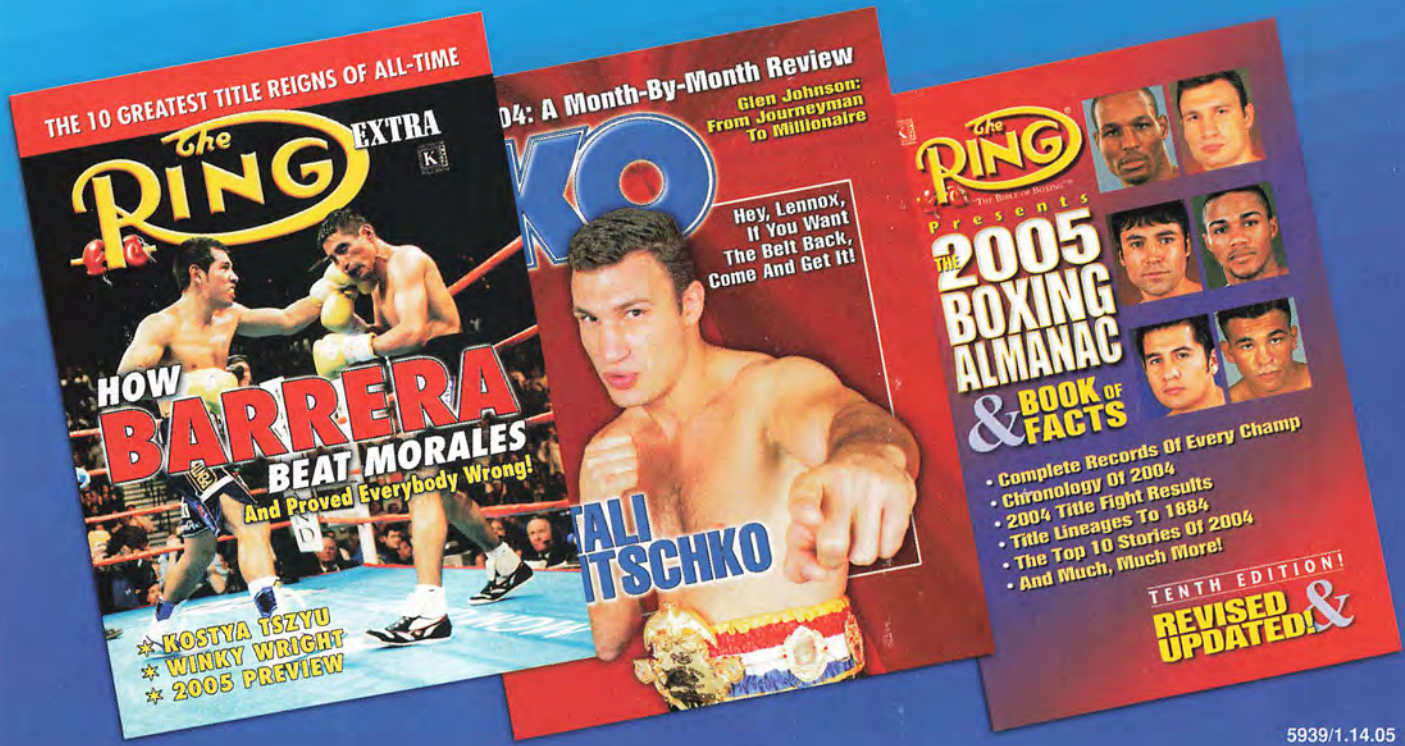

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from the desk of...

I'M FEELING A BIT boxed in these days ... literally. It's been more than a month since we moved our offices into the town of Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, which is less than a quarter-mile from our old office in Ambler. It's really nice here. Everything inside the building is brand new. Best of all, the London Publishing offices are out of the basement (or what was euphemistically referred to as the lower level). From where I sit, this two-story building is a skyscraper.

The only problem is the darn boxes. We're still waiting for our shelves to be built, and while we do, there are boxes everywhere, piled five-high all around my desk. Cut off from my fellow editors, I'm alone with my thoughts.

At this very moment, there is one in particular that I'd like to share not only with you, but my fellow editors and wrestling journalists around the world and in cyberspace as well. I'm downright tired of all the negative press this sport has been forced to endure over the past couple of years. I can accept the fact that the mainstream doesn't particularly care for professional wrestling; it's always been that way. Face it, a business that thrives on controversy invites criticism. But what's been weighing on my mind is the amount of friendly fire that's coming from people who understand and supposedly love the sport.

I can certainly appreciate the fact that there are those in the media who feel it is their job to continually run down the work of the people who create the product. Somebody has to tell Vince McMahon that after changing the face of the sport 20 years ago and making it into an entertainment phenomenon, he doesn't know what he's doing. Now, I'm not trying to be sanctimonious here. McMahon is by no means perfect, far from it. And we've taken him and other promoters to task many, many times. Sometimes our criticisms are justified; other times they are not.

Since the rise of the Internet, however, the overall trend has been for the media to present an overwhelmingly negative point of view. The reason is as simple as many of the "journalists" who are empowered by the ability to generate copy over the World Wide Web. In fairness, it would be wrong to lump together all the Internet reporters. While some are rank amateurs, others are solid pros. The problem with all journalists (myself and my co-editors very definitely included) is that we are contrarian by nature. By reporting the opposite of what seems obvious to the untrained eye, we raise ourselves to a level above our readers. Further, by writing about the shortcomings of those we report on, we are claiming to have superior intellect to them as well. When our egos are stroked by our readers, we can get to a very dangerous level at which we believe we are more important than the subject matter we are covering. Further exacerbating the situation is the cutthroat nature of this end of the business. Journalists who have been able to gain acclaim by generating controversy must one-up their competitors or risk losing their perceived power base.

By and large, journalists are not following a sinister plan. This is merely a study in human nature. The problems arise when we damage the industry by unfairly portraying it in a negative light. As I sit boxed in high above the streets of beautiful Blue Bell, I have to seriously think about the possibility that we at times can be as guilty of that as the 16-year-old Web master.

So, we will continue to fulfill our obligation to report bad news, both financially and artistically. We will continue to fulfill our obligation to serve as a watchdog for a sport that is often too willing to sacrifice its future for immediate gain. But when men and women are giving their souls and bodies to provide a little joy in our mundane lives, we must keep in mind that there is far, far more good in this industry than bad. And if any of us ever gets to the point at which we feel that the opposite is true, our only remaining obligation is to get out.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED (ISSN: 1043-7576), Vol. 26, No. 4, April 2005, is published 11 times a year, including two special issues and three double issues, by London Publishing Co., 6198 Butler Pike, Blue Bell, PA 19422. Periodicals postage paid at Blue Bell, PA 19422, and additional post offices. Postmaster: Send change of address notices to: PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, P.O. Box 2085, Marion, OH 43306-8185. Single copy price $4.95 ($6.75 in Canada, £2.95 in U.K.). Subscription price $76.45 in the U.S. ($103.47 in Canada and remaining countries). Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage.

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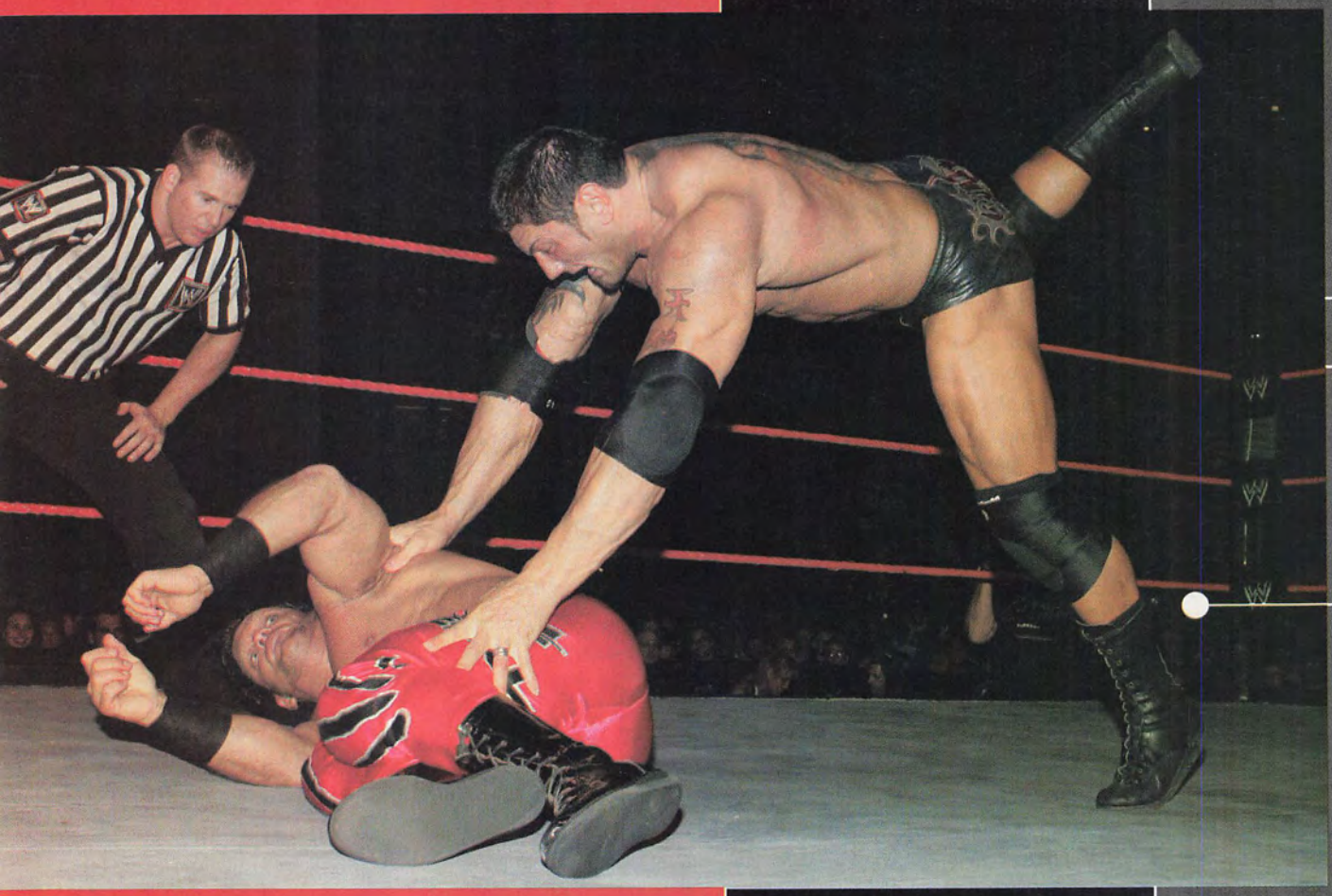
Printed in U.S.A.



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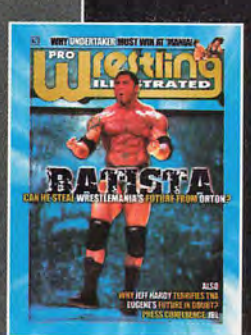

COVER DESIGN:
Greg Stevens

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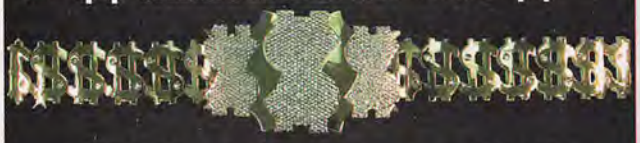

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Stacy Keibler logo key chain (WWEKC010)

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before the bell

Compiled by Will Welsh

Dynamite Isn't Quite

Sometimes it's easy to take certain aspects of pro wrestling for granted.

It seems like women's wrestling has been around forever, but historically speaking, it usually merits an afterthought (if that) among most fans. Many of today's fans can rattle of the names of at least a dozen former WWF or NWA world champions, but how many could name more than two women who competed throughout the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s?

Director Ruth Leitman stumbled onto a topic ripe for discovery when she followed several retired girl (as they still refer to themselves) wrestlers as they met up for the Gulf Coast Wrestlers' Reunion in Mobile, Alabama. Leitman lets some of these fascinating ladies, including 1930s star Gladys "Killem" Gillem, Fabulous Moolah, Mae Young, Ida Mae Martinez, Penny Banner (pictured slugging Verne Bottoms), and Ella Waldek, tell their personal stories, and paints an engaging picture of how the fairer sex got mixed up in the wrestling game.

The result is *Lipstick & Dynamite,* an 80-minute exploration of how some pioneering women were able to overcome a lack of formal schooling and earn fame and a chance to see the world through pro wrestling. It is scheduled for theatrical release in March.

"These girls are survivors in the truest sense," Leitman writes in the press packet that accompanied our advance copy of the film. "Sixty years later, tinged with colorful bravado and wistful glamour, they look back on their own lack of opportunity, objectification, and physical beating with proud and bitter nostalgia … what they gave me was a window from which to view some of the greatest feminist practice of the World War II generation."

If the thought of watching grainy, black-and-white women's matches presented as a feminist assault on male archetypes doesn't really excite you, don't panic. The women—particularly Gillem (whose frank and unprintable remarks on which ladies were sleeping with which promoters constituted some of the film's most unintentionally hilarious moments) and Waldek—never hold back, and they tear at some of the few sacred cows of women's wrestling. Clips of Fabulous Moolah appearing on *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* and Gillem challenging host Bill Cosby to a fistfight on *You Bet Your Life* are also quite funny.

And you'll be surprised to see some of the bumps and moves some of the girls were using way back in the 1950s. Waldek and Mildred Burke have physiques that rival those of Lita and Victoria, and they competed when weight training was in its infancy.

The biggest weakness of the film, however, is that the director doesn't have a strong knowledge of wrestling. Mae Young and Moolah stay largely in their WWE characters and talk about how they were rougher and tougher than most of the male wrestlers, while the rest of the girls are much more honest and factual. The famous Moolah/Spider Lady double-cross of Wendi Richter for the WWF women's title in 1985 was barely touched upon, with Moolah basically saying Richter refused to fight her and no one bothering to check the veracity of those claims.

At times, *Lipstick & Dynamite* looks like one of those docu-spoofs like *A Mighty Wind* or *Spinal Tap,* particularly when we see Martinez indulging in her new passion (yodeling!), or Moolah, Mae, and midget Diamond Lil living together in what looks like a bizarro world *Golden Girls.*

To mainstream audiences, it's an amusing and enlightening little film that seemed to be a labor of love for Leitman. For serious fans, it's a fun movie, but one that will leave you wanting more answers and less revisionist history, sappy music, and nostalgia.

Give it 2 ½ suplexes out of a possible five.

—Dan Murphy

Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related things you've been talking about lately, and our gut reaction to each.

10. Rick Steamboat signs with WWE as an agent. Ring of Honor's C.M. Punk just shed a tear.

9. WWE removes Paul Heyman from its writing team. Hey, can someone check the record player? It must be skipping again ... and again.

8. Muhammad Hassan and Khosrow Daivari debut for WWE. Geez, they make The Iron Sheik seem like he was downright friendly.

7. WWE does Christmas in Iraq. No, Hassan and Daivari didn't make the trip. Their tickets must have gotten lost or something.

6. Randy Savage walks out of TNA. Walks out? What the heck was he doing there in the first place?

5. After the releases of Jazz, Nidia, and Gail Kim, WWE sees an influx of attractive, but non-wrestling women. If you can name more than two of them and their roles off the top of your head, you have way too much time on your hands.

4. Daniel Puder wins *Tough Enough*. It's a good thing Puder is a shootfighter, because WWE's newest million-dollar man might need those skills backstage.

3. Triple-H makes his big screen debut in *Blade: Trinity*. Of course, he'll always be a wrestler first and an actor second. At least that's what he's saying now, right, Rock?

2. TNA standout A.J. Styles announces he'll be making a one-night-only return to Ring of Honor. Better once than not at all.

1. WWE tentatively schedules an ECW pay-per-view for June 5. Because there's nothing more extreme than nostalgia.

The Internet Insider

The following news items were culled from various wrestling-related Web sites—or were they? See if you can pick out the items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't necessarily mean that they were true) and the ones we blatantly made up. The answers appear at the end of this column on page 11.

1. At a recent *Raw,* Mick Foley and Ric Flair were backstage together for the first time since Flair's book—complete with disparaging remarks about Foley—was released. Since then, Foley had insulted Flair during a promo at a Ring of Honor event. But Flair approached Foley backstage and offered a handshake. Foley said he wasn't interested in shaking Flair's hand, but he did ask him, as a gesture of good faith, to sign a copy of his book so he could auction it off for charity. Flair wasn't pleased with Foley and threw a punch that landed but did no damage.

2. At a recent *Smackdown* taping, Chavo Guerrero Jr. and The Big Show got into a skirmish. Details are sketchy about exactly how it started, but just about anyone within 100 yards heard it because it began as a loud argument. Guerrero said something to Show about smaller wrestlers and bigger wrestlers, perhaps in reaction to a comment by Show. He ended up calling Show fat and lazy. Show took the bait and threw Guerrero across the dressing room. Agents and wrestlers broke it up quickly.

3. Vince McMahon isn't a fan of masked Luchadores, but he has come to like the intrigue that mask vs. mask matches create in Mexico. Because of this, he's been attempting to get Rob Van Dam to don a mask for a feud with his current partner, Rey Misterio Jr. McMahon believes that there's money in a feud between the high-flyers, but only if RVD wears a mask so that a mask vs. mask match can be booked down the line. So far, RVD has resisted the change, fearing that it'll hurt his career more than help it—especially because everyone knows already what he looks like. McMahon, though, keeps pushing his agenda.

4. The NBA's Atlanta Hawks, who won only five of their first 29 games, contacted The Big Show and asked him to attend a practice session. Show, intrigued, went to the practice and got on the court with the Hawks' centers, Jason Collier and Predrag Drobnjak. The basketball players showed up the slower and heavier Show, who walked off the court dejected. Hawks executives, who scouted Show when he wrestled for WCW, were interested in signing him if he played well, but instead simply thanked him for his time.

This Month In Wrestling History

April

April 20, 1895: Martin "Farmer" Burns defeats Evan "Strangler" Lewis, three falls to two, in Chicago to capture the American heavyweight championship. (We're betting that matchmakers weren't too pleased with this result. Sure, things were far more innocent back then, but we can't imagine a wrestler with the nickname of "Farmer" packed 'em in.)

April 9, 1917: Joe Stecher forfeits the World title to Earl Caddock in Omaha, Nebraska. Stecher wins the first fall in 1:22:05. Caddock evens the match by taking the second fall in 1:40:10. Stecher claims he wasn't pinned and is so livid that he refuses to wrestle the third fall. (Who wrestles for more than three hours and then quits? Seems suspicious to us. What are the odds Stecher was more winded than livid?)

April 12, 1934: Former world middleweight wrestling champion Jack Reynolds, 38, is indicted by a Cincinnati grand jury for the second-degree slaying of James Meyers and Philip Citron on March 11. He is acquitted on May 28, but according to an old version of our *Wrestling Almanac*, thereafter is relegated to working the tank towns and promoting "athletic shows" or carnival bouts for the remainder of his career. (Okay, this story is interesting enough ... but can someone explain to us what the heck a tank town is?)

April 20, 1936: Climaxing an eight-week tournament, Albion Britt beats Ted Christy in the tournament final at Hollywood Legion Stadium in California to become the first NWA World junior heavyweight champion. (For some reason, no matter how hard we try, we can't convince Pat Patterson—the first-ever WWE Intercontinental champion, who supposedly won his belt in a tournament in Brazil—that this match ever took place.)

April 18, 1989: International champion Jumbo Tsuruta beats PWF and United National champion Stan Hansen in Tokyo to become All-Japan's first Triple Crown champ. (You guessed it: Patterson has challenged the legitimacy of this match as well.)

We Heard That!

"I'm busting my head against a wall trying to change [Mexico's EMLL into a more North American-type promotion], but you can't convince the older guys, the headliners ... Even the wrestlers are brainwashed, but they're half-retarded anyway."

—Former WCW wrestler Vampiro, in an interview with the *Toronto Sun*

"You can say [being married to Stephanie McMahon] works to my advantage, but Vince is sometimes disinclined to listen to what I have to say. He's very big on people paying their dues. I don't want anything I don't have to work for."

—Triple-H, in an interview with the *Toronto Sun*

"I understand the psychology of the average guy because that's what I am."

—Vince McMahon, in an interview with *Esquire*

"[Eric Bischoff] didn't care. It was an ego trip, and it was all about Hogan, Hogan, Hogan."

—Rey Misterio Jr., talking about Bischoff's

decision to have him unmask in WCW, in an interview with the *Charleston Post-Courier*

"Michael [Cole] has talent, and to me he came from the news industry, so he might have thought he was superior to us wrestlers and peons. I think since he's been around, he's learned that he can't always crap on everybody."

—Former WWE executive Tom Prichard, in an interview with the *Pro Wrestling Torch*

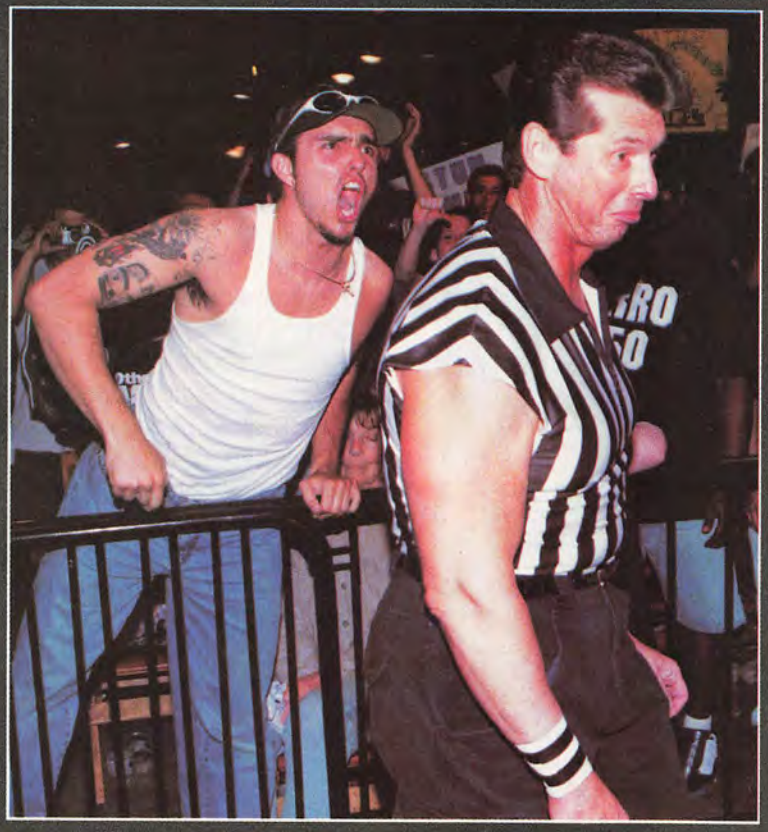
caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI*? Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This 23-year-old photo of former NWA World champs Dusty Rhodes and Tommy Rich staging an apparent sit-in in the ring needs a short, concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you're up to the task, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better.

October's Best

"Hey, diva Vince, I think it's time you started wearing a bra, old timer!"

—Sandra J., Toronto, Ontario



"Humph! Maybe he's still mad that I made him dress up as The Gobbledygooker all those years ago …"

—Stacy Bentz, stacybentz@shaw.ca

Vince McMahon is clearly less than impressed with Sonjay Dutt.

—showstoppa4202000@yahoo.com

"Bring back Jim Duggan. Hoooooo!"

—Mike Donato, Bohemia, NY

"Hey, Vince, if those things get any bigger, you'll need to borrow one of Stephanie's bras!"

—Frank G. Lloyd Jr., Richwood, WV

Answers to Internet Insider:

Items 3 and 4 are totally made up.

ringside

With Will Welsh

YOU STILL HEAR the "E-C-W! E-C-W!" chants when former ECW wrestlers collide in a WWE ring or when the action gets a bit extreme. *The Rise And Fall Of ECW* is on its way to becoming the biggest-selling WWE-produced DVD in its history. And, well, WWE can always use a spark to improve business.

So even though no one in the company had officially announced anything as of press time, it appears WWE will attempt to cash in further on the enduring popularity of ECW for at least one night this spring.

Circle June 5 on your calendar.

Paul Heyman didn't appear in the ring often for ECW, but he was the driving creative force behind the little promotion that became a phenomenon. It looks like he won't be involved in WWE's proposed ECW reunion pay-per-view, though.

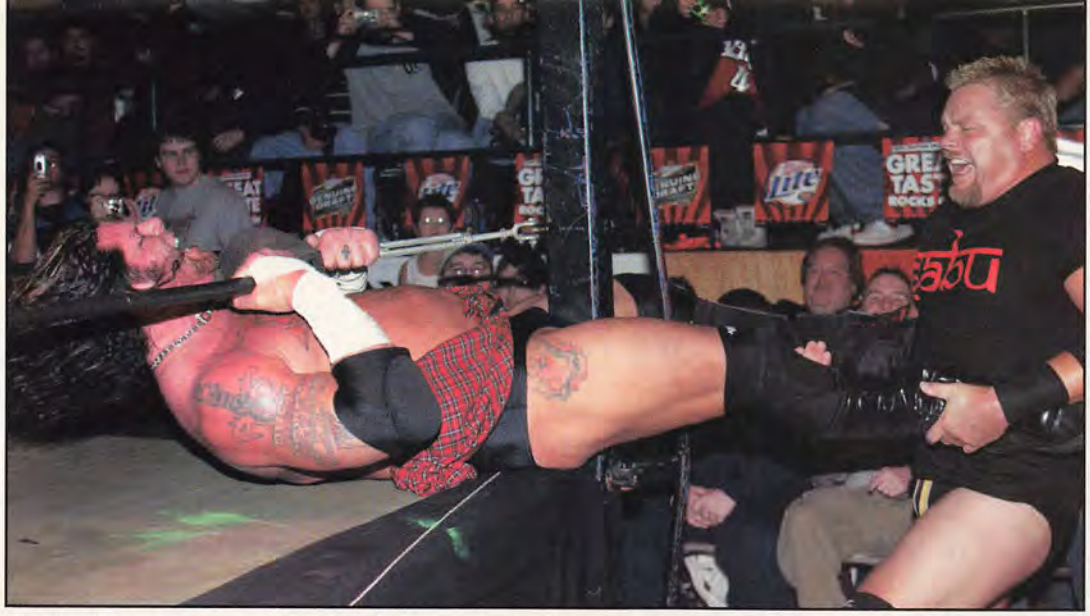
That's the night you can expect to see a WWE-produced ECW reunion pay-per-view emanating from the Hammerstein Ballroom—site of the final two ECW PPVs—in New York City. Since it hasn't been made official, there are no major details to be reported yet except for one. **Paul Heyman** is *not* expected to be involved in any capacity. That's right, the main creative force behind ECW will likely have no input into the show.

There's one other major problem with this PPV idea. A lot of other key ECW players won't be available or might not make themselves available to take part, either. Arguably ECW's two greatest champions, **Shane Douglas** and **Raven**, are under contract to TNA. Ditto for **Jerry Lynn**, who's been sidelined by injury. Health problems have plagued **Sabu** in recent months, and even if he were willing, his body might not be able enough to allow him to do more than make an appearance. **The Sandman** said in a recent Internet interview that he'd have no interest in participating in such an event (though I could see his thinking changing if an actual offer came his way). **Tazz** is probably too deep into retirement to do more than work as a broadcaster for the show.

As for key players that could be available, there's **Tommy Dreamer**, who works in the WWE offices now but would almost certainly do the show. Same for **Lance Storm**, now a trainer in OVW, and **Dean Malenko**, currently a backstage agent. And **Terry Funk**, **Justin Credible**, **Super Crazy**, **Francine**, **New Jack**, **Al Snow**, **Mick Foley**, and **Mikey Whipwreck** could all show up. Plus there are others who are well past their primes and only semi-active at best at this point.

Of course, WWE still has a number of ECW alumni on its active roster. **Buh Buh Ray**, **D-Von**, and **Spike Dudley**. **Eddie Guerrero**. **Chris Jericho**. **Rob Van Dam**. **Rey Misterio Jr.** **Dawn Marie**. **Chris Benoit**. **Simon Dean** (**Nova**). **Steven Richards**. **Nunzio**. **Rhyno**. **Tajiri**.

I'm not sure how WWE would



Ideally, all the major players from ECW's glory days would be involved in the WWE-produced ECW PPV. Unless Shane Douglas and Raven are no longer under contract to TNA in June, they won't be there.

build to an ECW PPV through its TV shows, but it looks like a tough card to put together. So many of those ECW alumni are either too established as WWE wrestlers at this point (Benoit, Guerrero, Misterio) to make their appearances on an ECW show being run by WWE seem special, or too far down on WWE cards to take seriously as even special ECW attractions (Richards, Nunzio, Rhyno, Tajiri).

Having written all this, I wouldn't mind seeing ECW return for one night if enough of the right non-WWE stars got on board. But if WWE wants to do this right, Heyman should not only be involved, but be given a lot of control over the booking. Maybe that could still happen.

For a few weeks at the start of the year, it felt like the old days of the WWF and WCW bidding for talent. Kind of. And **Abyss** was the man caught in the middle. The controversy started when Abyss, with his TNA contract reportedly on the verge of expiring, walked out of Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, before a taping of *Impact* on January 5 following a discussion with management.

A note on the TNA Web site a few days later confirmed his exit, even borrowing a line from WWE whenever it releases a wrestler and wishing him the best of luck in all his future endeavors.

The rumor going around at the time was that there was interest on WWE's part in signing Abyss, perhaps just as retaliation against TNA for the "cookie gate" invasion a few months back (Abyss was one of the wrestlers who "crashed" a WWE commercial shoot at Universal Studios), or perhaps because WWE saw a ton of potential in the big man. So he was absolutely, positively, for sure gone from TNA ... and then, suddenly, he wasn't. The item about Abyss departing was quietly removed from the TNA Web site by mid-January, and then, to everyone's surprise, Abyss attacked **Jeff Hardy** after his victory over **Scott Hall** at the Final Resolution PPV on January 16 (a Hardy-Abyss match was originally planned for that show). So Abyss is back and in good standing with TNA again. For now.

One man who is definitely gone (we think) is NWA Wildside promoter and former NWA President **Bill Behrens**, a key player behind the scenes. WWE is looking to open a few more developmental territories, one of which will likely be in Georgia, and Behrens has been contacted about possibly making Wildside one such territory.

It was pretty scary seeing two WWE wrestlers suffer serious knee injuries on the same PPV—and both on relatively safe moves. **Eugene**

Abyss is gone from TNA and likely bound for WWE. Oh wait! Now he's back in TNA and apparently staying there. January was quite the chaotic month for the 295-pound monster.

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ruptured his patella tendon while executing a dropkick during he and **William Regal's** Raw tag title defense against **Tyson Tomko** and **Christian** at New Year's Revolution. Just one match later, **Lita** tore her ACL while hitting a Thesz press against **Trish Stratus**. Both will have long roads to recovery.

Meanwhile, Smackdown up-and-comer **Jesus** was expected to miss about three months after undergoing surgery in January to repair a herniated disk in his neck that he suffered just a week before he battled U.S. champion **John Cena** in a streetfight at Armageddon. The disk was causing nerve problems and resulted in loss of much of the feeling in his left arm. Doctors told him he had a 90 percent chance of making a full recovery.

One WWE superstar who was on the road to recovery at press time was **Matt Hardy**, who made a surprise appearance at a January Live Action Wrestling card in Clinton, North Carolina, substituting for, of all people, the injured **Lex Luger**. Hardy was attacked by a team called **Fame and Fortune**, but he fought back and beat them with the twist of fate in a very brief handicap match. His knee must be healing nicely.

Chris Candido is already in the running to win Comeback of the Year for 2005. He has looked great in his initial appearances in TNA and could earn a contract soon. Candido has been very forthcoming about his past problems with substance abuse in recent interviews and is committed to remaining clean and sober *and* becoming a top star again.

Remember **Richard** and **Rod Johnson**, the tag team that TNA dressed up like giant, well, you can probably guess if you look at the picture, during the first few months of its existence? The Florida-based indy standouts are better known as **Mike** and **Todd Shane**, and now they have WWE contracts. The twins signed developmental deals just before press time. Let's hope a better gimmick awaits them when next they appear on a big stage.

In case you were wondering what happened to **The Dudley Boyz** this winter, as they disappeared completely from WWE TV and house shows, there were no injuries or personal or disciplinary problems to report. They were simply given a long-overdue break with the hopes that they would not only return physically refreshed, but that their characters would seem fresh again. Wouldn't it be a good idea to give *all* WWE wrestlers such a break once in a while!

That does it for me this month, fans. Enjoy your wanderings. □

Mike and Todd Shane would just as soon see everyone forget that they played Richard and Rod Johnson in TNA. Maybe they will if the Shanes make a big splash in WWE.

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in focus

By Dave Lenker

THE SAD STORY OF SABU

I'm as guilty as the next guy of taking advantage of Sabu. I'll admit it in front of everyone. As I read over the results of a benefit card for Sabu that was held in Belleville, Michigan, in December and then listened to the stories that Dan Murphy and Matt Brock—both of whom covered the event for *PWI*—eagerly told about the show, I wasn't sure how to feel. Mick Foley, Jimmy Hart, Raven, Shane Douglas, D-Lo Brown, Petey Williams, Jeff Hardy, A.J. Styles, Monty Brown—they were all there, as was Sabu himself. He received a standing ovation when he came out before the Douglas-Raven main event and said simply, "Thank you."

I imagine I was supposed to feel good that so many big- and small- and no-name superstars came together to wrestle/perform for free on a chilly Sunday night and financially help out a star who is suffering from a chronic case of two decades of putting his body through hell inside a wrestling ring. That's not what was written on his medical chart during the weeks upon weeks he spent in a hospital bed in 2004, but I'm offering you as telling a diagnosis as any.

I guess I should have felt good that about 700 fans packed the Diamondback Saloon (and several hundred more were turned away because there was nowhere to put them) not just to see some of their favorite superstars in action, but also to show *their* appreciation for a man who entertained them so much and to help him pay some of his medical bills.

I suppose I did feel good about that, but I also felt sad and even a little angry. Part of me wanted to lambaste Sabu for letting his body get so banged up. Part of me still thinks I should. Then I thought about why Sabu was in this condition. It took me back about 11 years to my first visits to the ECW Arena in Philadelphia. I remembered how he used to moonsault from the top rope through tables in the middle of the ring. Mind you, he didn't just happen to crash into these tables because his opponents had a knack for saving themselves by sliding off them and out of harm's way at the last instant. No, he routinely moonsaulted onto and sometimes through tables as part of a masochistic postmatch ritual. With no opponent in sight, he'd keep doing it until the table broke. People loved him for it. I loved watching him do it.

I also remembered being backstage at the Arena and watching Sabu get ready for matches. You can't appreciate the scars on that man's body—keep in mind that he has added significantly to his collection in the 11 years since then—until you see them up close. Appreciate is a funny word to use when discussing a wrestler's battle wounds, but it's appropriate here. If you didn't let yourself think much about the long-term consequences

Shane Douglas and Mick Foley were just two of the wrestlers who were glad to lend their star power to a benefit show for the ailing Sabu, whose plight is sad but not altogether unexpected.

of what he was slowly doing to his body, and it's easy not to when you're enjoying the show, you couldn't help but appreciate and admire his warrior mentality.

I took in many a Sabu match back then, and while few were great from a technical standpoint, they were never dull or predictable. I never knew what crazy stunt he had planned to top the last one, but I was eager to find out. If you asked me which wrestler I most enjoyed watching as I made my way out of the Arena on one of those nights, it wouldn't have taken much prodding to get me to choose Sabu.

Eventually, however, the hardcore style turned passe for me, as it did for a lot of other fans. I've seen all the Dudley Boyz table matches I'll ever need to see, thank you. Today I'd rather watch 10 Kurt Angle-Eddie Guerrero matches than cringe through one involving any two wrestlers and a shopping cart full of weapons or a bag full of thumbtacks. But I was hooked on Sabu for a while, and thousands of others were as well. As long as we couldn't get enough of him, he couldn't get enough of giving us what we all wanted from him and soaking up the reaction.

Now I wouldn't be all that surprised to see Sabu back in the ring in 2005. Wrestling is what he knows best. Maybe it's all he knows well.

Sabu never did become the megastar we all thought he'd become a decade or so ago. At this point, it doesn't matter why not. It's easy for us to say in hindsight that he should have saved more of his money in anticipation of days like these. And it would be easy for all of us to condemn him for wrecking his body the way he has. (Believe me, he is far from the only star of his generation who can look forward to a physically painful life after wrestling.) Before we do that, we should keep in mind that any one of us who has ever cheered one of his ridiculous stunts or chanted his name when he did something we didn't think the human body was meant to do is just a little bit responsible for what has happened to Sabu. I know I am.

QUICK HITTERS

•Hard to believe that word coming out of WWE (and out of Triple-H's mouth in some of the interviews he has done while promoting *Blade: Trinity*) is that while Brock Lesnar has been in touch fairly regularly regarding a possible return, the company isn't particularly interested. Right. This is obviously posturing on WWE's part, but as desperate as the Smackdown brand is for star power right now, I wouldn't be playing hardball with someone of his stature. Vinnie Mac has forgiven far greater transgressions than leaving with so little notice far more easily. And holding off on what seems like an inevitable return just to show Brock who's in charge would be extremely petty.

•Also hard to believe not only that WWE is tentatively planning to hold an ECW pay-per-view on June 5 from the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York City, but that if it does happen, Paul Heyman might not be involved at all. I'm not sure this will work even if Heyman *is* given complete creative control.

•It's easy to criticize WWE for wasting valuable TV time showcasing non-wrestling women in various stages of undress in non-wrestling situations (see the impromptu lingerie fashion show put together by Randy Orton during his night as Raw GM). It's even easier to criticize WWE for wasting valuable TV time showcasing non-wrestling women fully dressed in non-wrestling situations (see the limbo contest put together by Chris Jericho during his night as Raw GM). The lingerie show gave us the very cheap thrill of seeing hot women in lingerie. The limbo contest gave us the very cheap thrill of ... what exactly?

•A *looooooong* half-year into his Smackdown title reign, JBL has improved all facets of his game a great deal, and yet I still don't buy him as a main-eventer. Cena time can't come soon enough for me.

•Is it time for Vince Russo's next shocking return to TNA yet? Just checking.

(Have a comment or question about "In Focus" or anything else you see in ***PWI?*** *You can contact Dave Lenker via e-mail at dave_lenker@yahoo.com.)* □

Even given the success of *The Rise And Fall Of ECW* DVD, WWE running an ECW pay-per-view more than four years after ECW folded looks like a risky venture. Doing so with zero involvement of Paul Heyman would be super crazy!

off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

THE WORD FOR today is debacle. As I sit here swigging my Orangina and watching the flash strobes from Stu Saks' camera bounce against the wall by my desk while he takes random photos of nothing, I feel the need to vent. Between tsunamis, Michael Jackson, and the FCC's crackdown on free speech, I'm just plain pooped. Wait, I better check the FCC Web site to make sure the word "crackdown" isn't offensive now, too. Sheesh!

Why does the WWE diva swap remind me of used car salesmen tactics? Sure, they'll offer you something shiny and new, but try to use it. It'll fall apart the first time you ride in it. If I was Victoria, I'd be crying right now. After all, she took the time to get trained, spending months and months as a developmental to learn her craft. Apparently, that was wasted time. Silly her, didn't she realize that education is for ugly chicks?

Well, at least we still have TNA to save us. Okay, so maybe not. While I enjoy the fact that I can see Frankie Kazarian and Michael Shane wrestle on an almost-weekly basis, I still wonder if they'll have jobs tomorrow. Heck, any company that doesn't let Christopher Daniels be his evil self is screwing up completely in my book.

Don't worry, my pets, if it's evil that you truly want, then it's evil you shall receive. I am your champion! I can do that, ya know!

Dear Brandi,

I have two questions to ask:

1. If Heidenreich claims he's not afraid of The Undertaker, then why is he always trying to run away from the ring like a two-year-old? He should stand up to his fights like a man instead of running away.

2. Do you think Eddie Guerrero will ever be more popular than Chris Benoit? Or the best in WWE?

KESHIA MANSELL
cartoonistkay@msn.com

Dear Keshia,

I have two answers and a statement to give:

1. Heidenreich is nuts. Who knows why he's running away from The Undertaker. I'm sure Heidenreich thinks he has a plan. I'm also sure that it wouldn't make any sense to most intelligent people.

2. In my estimation, Eddie Guerrero and Chris Benoit are pretty much on the same level of popularity in WWE ... and neither one of them will get any hotter.

Statement: You asked three questions.

Dear Brandi,

Wow! My drunken 2 a.m. rambling e-mail is the "idiot" letter in the March 2005 issue! I'm so proud. However, I must correct an injustice. My lovely wife's name is on our e-mail account, and therefore it looks like she sent you that rambling mess. I can't let her name be sullied by my beer-induced stupidity. My name is John, and *I'm* the idiot.

That being said, I'd like to read how you feel about Samoa Joe's reign as ROH champ, and how you feel about Austin Aries and his title win. Thanks again.

JOHN HEDGEPETH
staggolee@msn.com

Dear John,

Oh, I wasn't wrong for including your wife's name with your letter, and

See, The Undertaker runs away from Heidenreich, too! Undie runs just as often as Heidie! If you don't believe me, here's visual proof!

now that I know the full story of what happened, I do think she's an idiot. After all, she married someone who types rambling e-mails about wrestling at all hours of the night when he's inebriated. You, dear John, are the one who sullied her name!

As for Samoa Joe, I'm happy his title reign is over. He seemed to be getting too comfortable in his position of power. This loss will only fuel his climb to even greater heights. It's the best thing for him, really.

Dear Brandi,

What has happened to the popularity of wrestling? Back in 1999, almost everyone I knew watched pro wrestling. Now it seems like only the hardcore fans watch wrestling. Do you think the popularity has gone down because of bad gimmicks and bad storylines, or was wrestling just a fad of the late-'90s? Do you think wrestling will ever be as popular as it was in the late-'90s again?

MARTY HANSEN
MAMH121890@aol.com

Dear Marty,

What would make you write that wrestling isn't popular? People *are* watching, gosh darn it! Check the Nielsen ratings! Wrestling is still doing better than a lot of TV shows, like the wildly popular *This Old House*. Now, I know I can't even pull myself away from the Carlisle project, either, but I do still catch their progress in repeats on Sundays if I miss it. Maybe the problem is that back in 1999, you had a different crowd of friends. Maybe now, you just aren't invited to their Raw parties. What I'm trying to tell you is that wrestling is popular; you're not.

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with you all):

Dear Brandi,

I'm huge fan of Pro Wrestling Illustrated. I read it when ever I can and read your articles to see what you have to say. I do respect you oppinion on alot of things. However Brandi in the past recent issues of PWI, you lost a lot of my respect. I have one question for you. What is your problem!?!?!?!!!!

You go off saying the only reason why us women only get a job in wrestling is because of our LOOKS? And only a few cat fights. Excuse me but is the only thing you watch in wrestling are the cat fights? Why are you putting Hulk Hogan and his talented daughter down? Oh, Little Missy I HAVE NEWS FOR YOU. SO LISTEN UP BECUASE YOUR GOING TO SCHOOL HERE. Major Gunns is the second most reconizable Diva in the history of World Championship Wrestling(WCW). Number 1 outside of the WWE and WCW franchise. You go and say she can't wrestle? Then your had the nerve to disrespect her by calling her Frankenhooter? Excuse me but the Divas on Raw and Smackdown are very talented and do more then just "cat fights." Here are some example that are as good or probly even better then some of the guys; Chyna, Jazz, Major Gunn, Victoria, Ivory, Jacqueline, Lita, Gail Kim and Molly Holly. Just to name a few. Another thing that caught my attention is the fact that you said Stephanie Mcman is better off where she is off camara? Excuse me hun, but what have you been smoking? Stephanie is two time Womens Champion and was an excellent manjor for Smackdown. It was also an excellent part on Stephanie to buy Extreme Championship Wresting(ECW) despite what you think. With all that under her belt your saying she's better off camra!?!?!?!

Oh and here is some advice for you Brandi. Next time your interviewing a Superstar, don't try to make it seem like it was someone else's fault for a lost just so you have something to write for your colmmen. By the way I did spell check and made sure that font was big enough for you to read. So you didn't have to edited or rewrite my letter before it goes into your article.

Krystal Altman
Undertakerfan134@aol.com

Dear Dead Brain,

Oh my! Spell checks aren't what they used to be! As you somewhat stated, I didn't have to edit your letter. I'm running it in all of its, *uh*, glory. You wholeheartedly deserve to have your words printed verbatim.

I just love ol' Hacksaw's segments on *This Old House*. What? He's not the new host? Then who was that scary flanneled guy thumbing his way through the rafters of the barn section of the Carlisle project?

I do have a problem, and it's with delusional fans like you. How could you possibly think Major Gunns was the second most recognizable WCW diva? So, do Torrie Wilson and Stacy Keibler share the number-one spot? What about Kimberly or Woman? They were both with WCW long before Major Gunns had two orbs of saline placed below her skin. They were both mere valets, but they did their jobs very well. Hell, Woman is undoubtedly the most enduring female manager in wrestling, with a career that was longer than that of another WCW valet, Elizabeth.

Unfortunately, Vince's latest hiring spree is straight out of an issue of *Maxim* magazine and is a shining example of what I wrote in the October 2004 issue. According to Vince, we should forget strong female characters like Sherri Martel and Madusa Miceli and settle for fluffy lapdogs who are willing to get naked for a bag of Cheetos.

By the way, Stephanie McMahon should most definitely stay behind the camera. She has a brilliant mind for this business and is best utilized on the management level instead of as a bit player in the game. □

The Undertaker was supposed to make quick work of JBL and take his WWE Smackdown title easily at SummerSlam ... or at No Mercy. He almost did, but in the end, he failed both times. Still, JBL seems to survive title defenses rather than excel in them.

JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD

WHEN ONE STUDIES WWE history, one can't help but be overwhelmed by the wealth of great champions who held the World title aloft with pride and glory. Bruno Sammartino. Bob Backlund. Hulk Hogan. Bret Hart. Shawn Michaels. Steve Austin. Triple-H.

But take a closer look at that World title lineage and you will find less familiar names scattered among the greats, like fuzzy, black mildew growing beneath immaculately clean shower tiles. Names like Stan Stasiak, Ivan Koloff, and Sgt. Slaughter.

And, many would say, John Bradshaw Layfield.

JBL's Smackdown championship reign is one of the unlikeliest developments in recent wrestling history. Many fans and analysts pegged Eddie Guerrero as likely to enjoy a long run as champion once he upset Brock Lesnar at No Way Out last year and dispatched Kurt Angle a month later at WrestleMania XX. Former Acolyte and career-long mid-carder JBL was supposed to be just one of the first notches on Guerrero's championship belt.

But things just didn't work out that way.

JBL captured the title in a huge upset in a bullrope match at The Great American Bash. Most fans and most members of the wrestling media predicted he'd be a transitional champion, like those moldy names above. But JBL went on to successfully defend his title against the best talent the Smackdown brand had to offer, turning back the challenges of Guerrero, The Undertaker, and Booker T. He even survived what essentially turned out to be a three-on-one bout against all those superstars at Armageddon.

Yet virtually everyone has been slow to give Layfield respect, noting he has rarely won matches cleanly and arguing that he has done little to increase the prestige of the Smackdown title. However, these are the same knocks the critics used to levy against Ric Flair at one point in his career, and today Flair is considered one of wrestling's all-time greats.

*Okay, so maybe JBL is no Flair, but where does he stand? Does he truly deserve that title around his waist, or will his reign be remembered as a black mark on WWE title history? **PWI** Senior Writers Harry Burkett, Dan Murphy, and Will Welsh met with the reigning Smackdown champ to get the thoughts of the man beneath the 10-gallon hat and behind the 10 pounds of gold.*

Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.

HARRY BURKETT: Thank you for joining us, Mr. Layfield. There are a few topics we'd like to discuss with you today, and I'd like to start off with a question that's been on my mind as a wrestling historian. Tell me, where do you think you rank on the all-time list of WWE champions?

JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD: That's simple, son. I could give you my answer right away, and we could all sit around here and debate it until the cows come home, so let me bring all you boys around to my way of thinking. You there, guy with the beard. Who do you think is the greatest WWE champion of all-time?

> *"HERE'S WHAT THE HEADLINE OF YOUR NEXT STORY ON ME SHOULD BE: 'JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD—TRUE AMERICAN HERO.' TELL THE STORY OF A GOOD OL' SOUTHERN BOY WHO PULLED HIMSELF UP BY HIS BOOTSTRAPS, WORKED HIS TAIL OFF TO MAKE A LITTLE MONEY, MOVED TO THE BIG CITY, INVESTED WISELY, AND REACHED THE PINNACLE OF SPORT AND ENTERTAINMENT."*

DAN MURPHY: My personal choice would be Bob Backlund, but I think popular opinion would probably be Bruno Sammartino or Hulk Hogan.

LAYFIELD: Tell me this: Did Bruno Sammartino or Backlund or Hogan ever beat Booker T, The Undertaker, and Eddie Guerrero all in one match?

MURPHY: Well, no, but considering ...

LAYFIELD: Hold on there, pudgy. This is my interview, and your *considerations* don't mean a damn thing to me. The answer to my question is no. You there, pencil neck. Now that Sammartino, Hogan, and Backlund are out, who do you think is the greatest WWE champion?

WILL WELSH: This is ridiculous.

LAYFIELD: Answer the question, boy! You tracked me down for an interview, so let's start exchanging ideas. Best champ?

WELSH: All right, let's try Bret Hart.

LAYFIELD: Yeah, I think I remember that guy. Little guy, greasy hair. Tell me, did he ever beat The Undertaker in a "Last Ride" match?

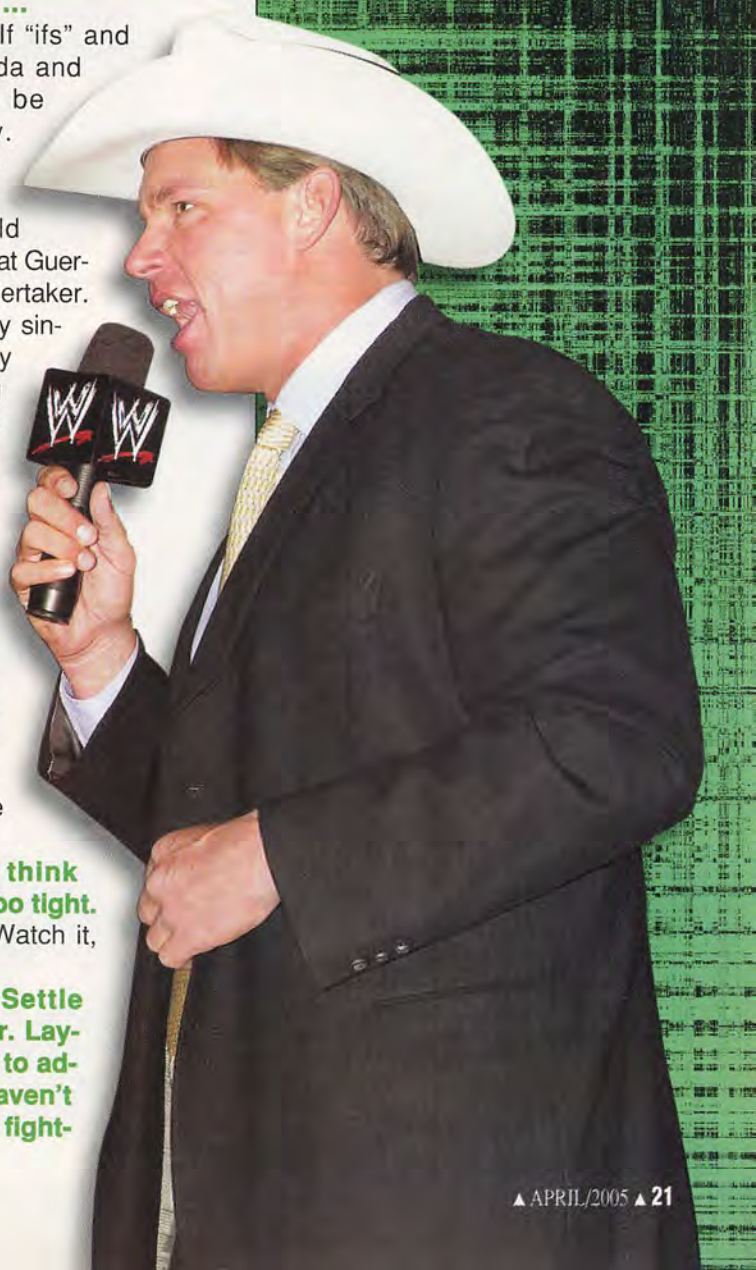
WELSH: Well, he did beat The Undertaker a few times, but I don't think he ever faced him in a "Last Ride" match. Of course, if he did and he had Heidenreich running interference for ...

LAYFIELD: If "ifs" and "buts" were soda and nuts, we'd all be having a party. Look, boys, the fact of the matter is that I hold this title belt. I beat Guerrero. I beat Undertaker. Hell, I beat every single chump they put in the ring with me, but it's never enough. You left wing media geeks may not like it, but I am the rightful champion around here, and I'm the best damn champion this federation has ever seen. Case closed.

MURPHY: I think your hat's on too tight.

LAYFIELD: Watch it, son.

BURKETT: Settle down, guys. Mr. Layfield, you have to admit that you haven't exactly been a fight-



JBL is much more cocky when taking on challengers that are much smaller than he is. Rey Misterio Jr. fits into that category, although he has given the champ a few problems. And Shannon Moore definitely fits.

ing champion of late. You have surrounded yourself with your cabinet and your chief of staff, and you seem to be reluctant to face top contenders. In fact, on Smackdown's recent "Night Of Champions," you replaced every name in a prematch lottery with Shannon Moore's name, ensuring you would defend your title against a man a foot shorter than you and a man who hasn't cracked the Top 10 ratings in his life.

LAYFIELD: Everybody assumed I was the one who put Moore's name in there. If I had my druthers, don't you think I would have snuck Torrie Wilson's name in there? Or at least Doug or Danny Basham, both of whom would have laid down for me and given me the easy night that I deserve after almost a year as champion? If it wasn't Orlando Jordan's honest mistake there, then it's obvious that Shannon Moore—the degenerate that he is—spiked that punch bowl. But all you elitist, blue state media folks want to hang an honest guy like me out to dry. Hey, that guy kind of

It should be pointed out JBL, while still a brawler at heart (above), has stepped up his in-ring game considerably since winning the Smackdown title. It can be hard to take him seriously, however, when he does so much backpedaling (right).

looks like Michael Moore!

MURPHY: Oh, come on! And by the way, your title reign has lasted a little more than six months as of today, not "almost a year."

WELSH: John, you've certainly defied expectations, and you deserve credit for that. This might sound like a strange question, but how much of your current success is due to your political beliefs, and how much is due to your wrestling ability?

LAYFIELD: My political beliefs? Exactly what is that supposed to mean, kid?

MURPHY: Let's face it, Bradshaw. Vince McMahon has made no secret that he shares many of your political views. Vince has been one of your most vocal supporters. It makes you wonder if Vince is pulling strings for you and helping you hold on to that title.

LAYFIELD: Now that is the biggest load of hogwash I've ever heard! I can't help it if Vince McMahon and I share some points of few. Heck, we're the silent majority in this country. Look at the election, boys. More people agree with what I have to say than you'd care to admit. You Northeasterners are all alike. Here's what the headline of your next story on me should be: "John Bradshaw Layfield—True American Hero." Tell the story of a good ol' Southern boy who pulled himself up by his bootstraps, worked his tail off to make a little money, moved to the big city, invested wisely, and reached the pinnacle of sport and entertainment. I'm an author, a talk show host, a financial wizard, and a champion, and you three liberal wackos are going to try to talk down to me?

If someone told you a year ago that Triple-H would have been posing at a WrestleMania 21 press conference with Bradshaw, and they'd be holding WWE's two biggest belts, how hard would you have laughed? JBL's the one laughing now.

WELSH: Listen, you're talking to a former U.S. Marine here.

BURKETT: Let's all settle down here, guys. Politics is just one of several topics we wanted to address. We've done that, so let's move on. Mr. Layfield, you have your cabinet and your chief of staff. Will you continue to bring others onto your team, or is your "staff" where you want it to be right now?

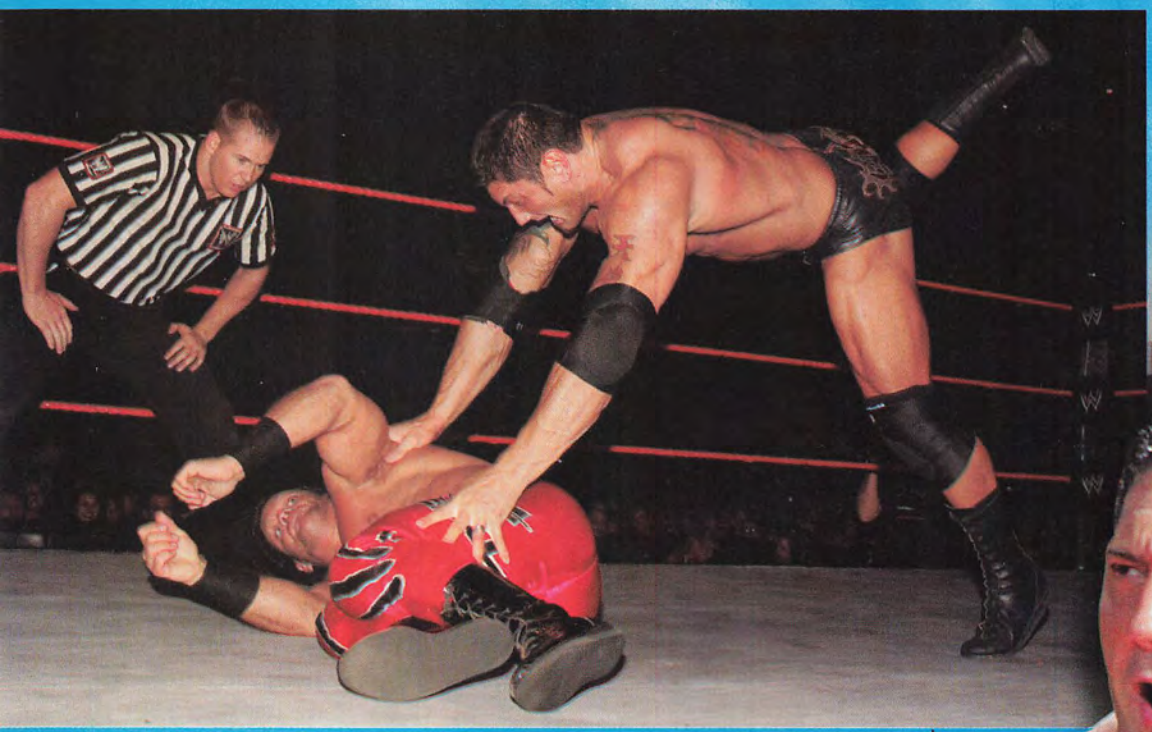
LAYFIELD: A wise man never paints himself into a corner, son. I reserve the right to hire and fire at will. Thus far, all my boys and that little lady of mine are doin' a heck of a job for me. I'm tellin' you, though, if I had a wishy-washy employee like some of the people in government that I won't name, I would have fired him so fast it'd make his head spin.

MURPHY: Now that you have turned back challenges from Booker, 'Taker, and Guerrero, it looks like The Big Show and John Cena might be your next big tests. How do you think you would fare against Cena in particular?

LAYFIELD: John Cena represents everything wrong with America today. He dresses like a slob. He has no manners at all. Half the time he's blindsiding people with that damn chain of his like a street thug. I can't imagine him ever working his way up the ladder to get a shot at this title that I rightfully own, but if he did, I'd knock him right back down to the prelims.

WELSH: If I may say so, JBL, despite your recent success, you seem to have the reverse Midas touch, in that everything you do seems to come back and bite you in the butt sooner or later. You ruined most of the goodwill you had with the troops overseas when you showed up in a biohazard suit in Iraq. You've devalued your title to a point where more people seem to care about the U.S. title than the Smackdown title at times. And we won't go into a certain incident in Germany last year. You're going to make a misstep, and it's going to cost you, just like it always seems to.

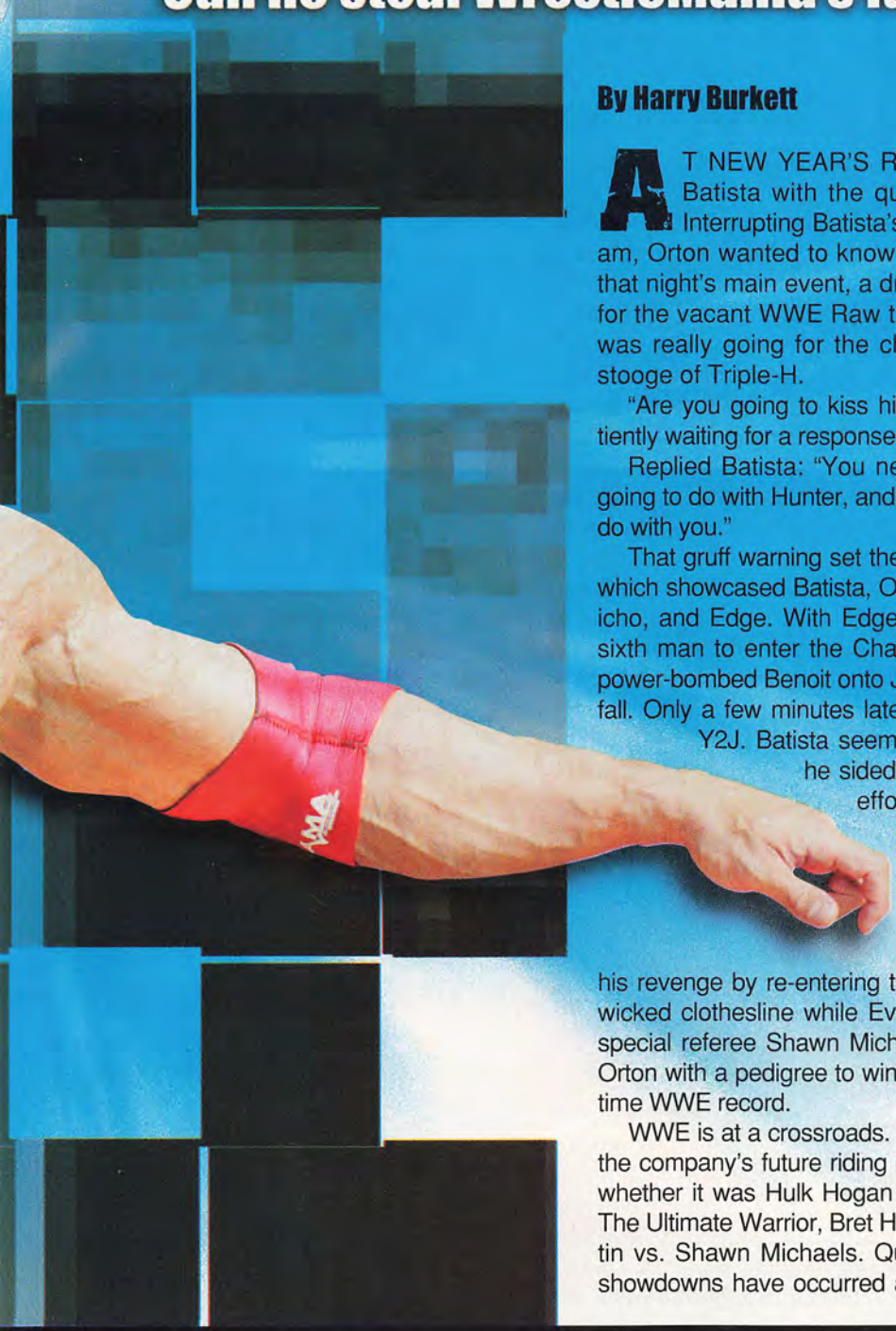
LAYFIELD: That wasn't even a question! I'm not going to sit here and listen to you three Communists. Doug! Danny! *(The Bashams enter the interview area and glare at the reporters.)* This interview is over. I got half a mind to put a personal embargo on your use of my name and likeness. Take a good look at my title belt here, boys, because you're not gonna see it again in person for a long, long time. □



If you think Chris Benoit looks surprised to see Batista on the verge of driving his right knee into Benoit's kidney, well, just imagine how surprised Randy Orton must be to see Batista's star suddenly rising faster than his.

BATISTA

Can he steal WrestleMania's future from Orton?



By Harry Burkett

AT NEW YEAR'S Revolution, Randy Orton confronted Batista with the question that demanded an answer. Interrupting Batista's interview segment with Todd Grisham, Orton wanted to know exactly where the big man stood in that night's main event, a dreaded "Elimination Chamber" match for the vacant WWE Raw title. Orton asked Batista whether he was really going for the championship—or going to remain a stooge of Triple-H.

"Are you going to kiss his ass or kick it?" asked Orton, impatiently waiting for a response.

Replied Batista: "You need to stop worrying about what I'm going to do with Hunter, and start worrying about what I'm going to do with you."

That gruff warning set the stage for the "Elimination Chamber," which showcased Batista, Orton, Triple-H, Chris Benoit, Chris Jericho, and Edge. With Edge already eliminated, Batista was the sixth man to enter the Chamber. Shortly after his entry, Batista power-bombed Benoit onto Jericho, then eliminated Benoit via pinfall. Only a few minutes later, Batista power-bombed and pinned Y2J. Batista seemed to answer Orton's question when he sided with Triple-H in a brutal double-team effort. But when Batista tried to power-bomb Orton, the third-generation superstar shifted his body weight and planted the 6'6", 318-pound monster with the RKO for the three-count.

Later in the match, Batista gained his revenge by re-entering the Chamber and nailing Orton with a wicked clothesline while Evolution teammate Ric Flair distracted special referee Shawn Michaels. Triple-H downed a near-lifeless Orton with a pedigree to win his 10th world championship—an all-time WWE record.

WWE is at a crossroads. There have been several examples of the company's future riding on the outcome of a particular match, whether it was Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant, Hulk Hogan vs. The Ultimate Warrior, Bret Hart vs. Shawn Michaels, or Steve Austin vs. Shawn Michaels. Quite appropriately, those high-stakes showdowns have occurred at WrestleMania, where WWE places

Batista has been more physically dominant and more confident inside the ring in recent months than he ever had been in the past. Fans are noticing. They're noticing and appreciating his personality as well.

"Just a few months ago, it seemed as if WrestleMania 21 would be a coronation ceremony for another third-generation superstar. But something funny happened on the road to WrestleMania: Batista is on the verge of becoming a phenomenon."

its biggest bets.

During the second half of 2004, it was widely assumed that classic confrontation would be a Raw title match between Triple-H and former Evolution teammate Randy Orton. Yet, as 2004 turned to 2005, tension mounted between Helmsley and Batista, leading fans to believe there would be another defection in Evolution. Because Orton's long-awaited rematch from Unforgiven took place on the January 3 edition of *Raw*, the theory that Triple-H would face Batista at WrestleMania 21 gained credibility.

Would WrestleMania feature Helmsley-Orton or Helmsley-Batista as Raw's main event offering? Or would the more appropriate match be Orton vs. Batista ... or Triple-H vs. Orton vs. Batista? Even with Triple-H going into the event as the Raw champion, the real rivalry would be between Orton and Batista—and WrestleMania would determine who would lead WWE into the future.

So, what happened between SummerSlam 2004, when Orton won the Raw title and was hailed as the second coming of The Rock, and the winter of 2004, when Batista began building momentum? The most telling evidence of the shift in momentum was during the "Elimination Chamber" match at New Year's Revolution. When Orton used the RKO to pin Batista, the sellout crowd in San Juan, Puerto Rico, responded with loud boos.

The hostile reaction to Orton in San Juan underscored what WWE insiders had already come to believe. Orton was no longer WWE's golden boy, not quite ready to become the next Rock, and too arrogant—and not quite cool enough—to become a red-hot fan favorite. Meanwhile, the surge of popularity intended for Orton actually began to bubble up for another superstar: the mighty Batista. He was soft-spoken and a junior member of Evolution, but his incredible physique and obvious work ethic made him popular with the fans.

WWE simply cannot manufacture a spontaneous groundswell of support for any superstar. As frustrating as it is, the only choice is to sit back and wait for it to happen.

When nobody was looking, Batista gained a mystique.

It has occurred before. Sting spent 15 months in the rafters and benefited from a huge buildup, but he found it impossible to live up to those expectations when he returned to WCW rings in late-1997. When the Sting phenomenon fell flat, the fans latched onto a virtually unknown newcomer and created a new superstar. His name was Bill Goldberg.

If you had been asked six months ago which of these two autograph signers was going to be a megastar when WrestleMania 21 was over, you wouldn't have hesitated in answering. Now ...

"Batista reminds me of Goldberg very much," said eight-time NWA World champion and WWE Hall of Famer Harley Race. "When a promoter gets behind a guy, gives him all the bells and whistles, sometimes the fans rebel against that because they want to have the final say. Today's fans are aware of their power more than ever before. The strong, silent types like Goldberg and Batista have their appeal. Fans get tired of the complicated stuff, and the ways wrestlers promote themselves, and say, look here, let's get back to basics. They just want a guy to lace up his boots and take care of business in the ring. Goldberg had it. Steve Austin and Brock Lesnar had it. I think Batista has it, too."

A Batista demon bomb (right) almost always leads to a Batista pinfall victory (above). Triple-H knows that ... and grows more and more wary of the big bruiser with each passing week.

Where does this leave Orton? Shouldn't he be bitter about Batista grabbing the brass ring that had his name inscribed on it?

"No, no, not at all," replied Race. "If Batista can reach Goldberg or 'Stone-Cold' proportions, and that's a tall order, then Orton should be all for that. So what if Orton isn't the next Rock. Worst-case scenario, he can be the guy standing across the ring from Batista, and make a lot of money doing it. And if Batista starts to get the attention, maybe Orton can build momentum a little more slowly and naturally and quietly and be better off a year from now. Orton's a good Kansas City boy, and he'll be successful regardless. But Batista ... I really think something's happening there."

Right now, everyone is wondering when Batista will make his move against Triple-H. Surely, the Raw title is worth falling out of favor with Evolution. Yet Batista could be playing a patient waiting game. When the dynamics for WrestleMania begin to take shape, perhaps then Batista will take the proper course of action.

For someone who is such a brute inside the ring, Batista is surprisingly soft-spoken and even mellow at times away from the squared circle. It's an appealing contrast. His quiet intensity stands out.

Just a few months ago, it seemed as if WrestleMania 21 would be a coronation ceremony for another third-generation superstar. But something funny happened on the road to WrestleMania: Batista is on the verge of becoming a phenomenon.

The big winner at WrestleMania will be the future of this business. That future once belonged to Orton ... but a monster named Batista is poised to steal it. ☐

TNA's Greatest Fear:

Photos By Vern Verna

NWA CHAMPION JEFF HARDY!

By Jason Langin

IT'S EVERY FATHER'S worst nightmare.

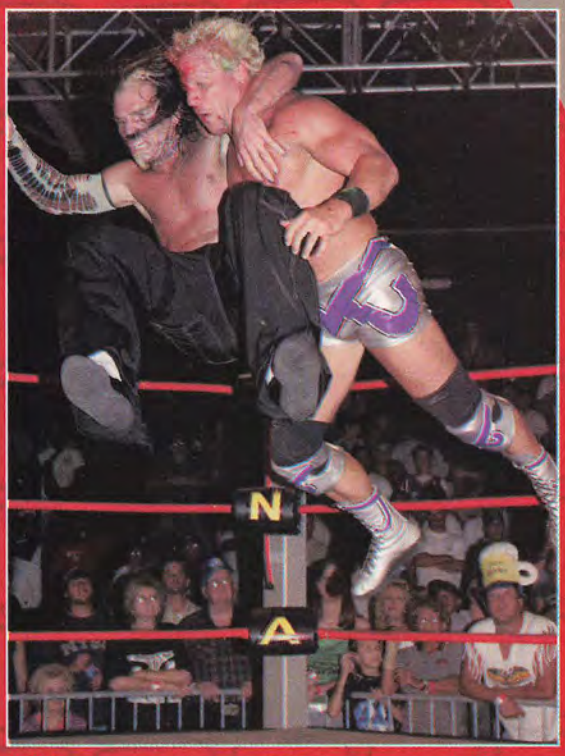
The front door opens and in walks your daughter—your little girl. The little girl for whom you have had such high expectations since the day she was born. The beautiful little girl you swore you would always protect. The apple of your eye. Your precious angel.

And then in walks Bruno. No, not Sammartino. Bruno with the leather jacket with Slayer patches on the shoulders, with more piercings than you've ever seen in one human being, with the barbed-wire tattoo surrounding his neck. Whatever it is you hate, old Bruno has it. It's enough to make a dad wake up at night screaming.

And while it might not be as dramatic a situation, the TNA championship committee is experiencing the same fear with a young gentleman by the name of Jeff Hardy.

When Hardy entered TNA in June 2004, virtually everyone associated with the company was ecstatic. Hardy, still just 27, was one of WWE's top stars earlier in the decade, a man who had participated in PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED'S Match of the Year two years in a row. With their teeny-bopper following, Hardy and brother Matt formed one of WWE's most celebrated tag teams. What a steal for TNA to finally get his signature at the bottom of a contract.

Upon entering the organization, Hardy was matched up against A.J. Styles in a veritable dream match. Their first encounter ended in a no-contest, and the two became fast friends. Hardy then went on an absolute tear, defeating opponent after opponent. In the fall, Hardy fought his way through a top contenders tournament, defeating two physically imposing competitors in Abyss and Monty Brown. It seemed almost certain that the NWA championship belt was within his grasp.



Jeff Hardy severely tested NWA champion Jeff Jarrett on several occasions in the second half of 2004, but it might be a while before he again challenges for that gold. Are TNA execs breathing a sigh of relief?

So close yet so far away from winning the title. Jeff Hardy could be a very exciting NWA champion. He'd also likely be a quirky, enigmatic one.

Friday afternoon is not exactly prime time for watching wrestling. Unless you have an odd work or school schedule, you're not particularly busy, you have TiVO, or you actually know how to program your VCR, TNA is not gracing your television screen every week. TNA just can't seem to get the maximum exposure for which it is searching.

And Hardy might not be the guy to give it what it needs. With his body paint, shredded clothes, and "out there" attitude, Hardy isn't the guy that is going to carry the banner for TNA to television executives. Hardy is known to be the freest of free spirits, taken to coming and going when he pleases. Criticize Jeff Jarrett all you want, but at least the guy can carry on a conversation with the suits. Could you say the same for Hardy? Would you want to find out?

If you look back on the past decade, most of the top champions have been individuals who could carry themselves both in and out of the ring. Men like Hulk Hogan, Steve Austin, Ric Flair, Kurt Angle, and Bret Hart were just as comfortable chatting it up with Regis Philbin or Howard Stern as they were at executing headlocks and bodyslams. A non-wrestling fan wouldn't

"Hardy is known to be the freest of free spirits, taken to coming and going when he pleases. Criticize Jeff Jarrett all you want, but at least the guy can carry on a conversation with the suits. Could you say the same for Hardy? Would you want to find out?"

And that's when the TNA powers-that-be gasped. Be careful what you wish for, folks ...

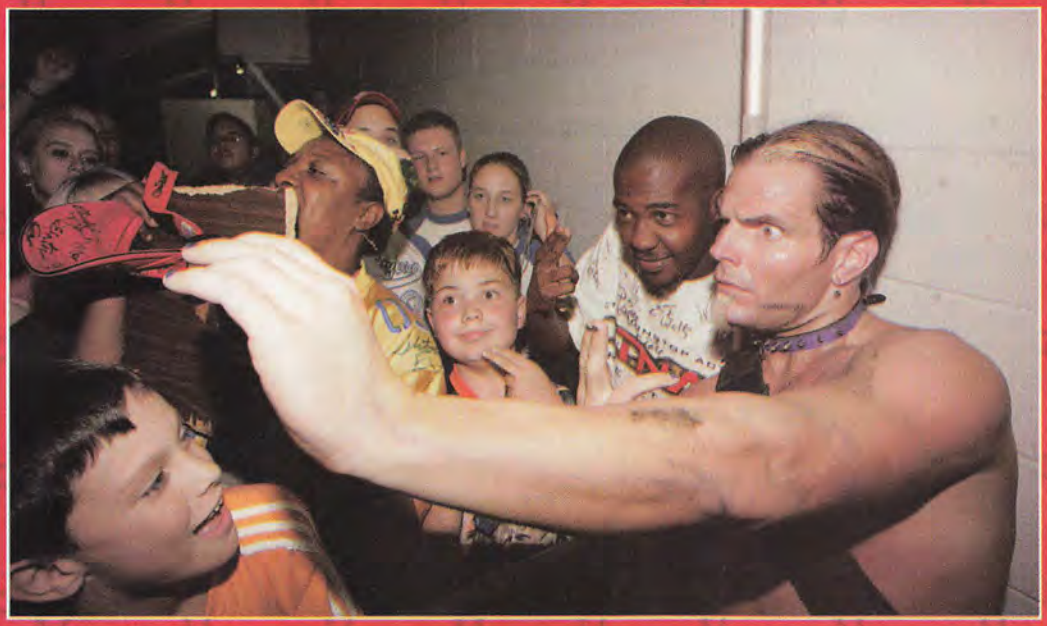
Yes, Hardy did seem as if he was on the verge of defeating Jeff Jarrett for the NWA heavyweight championship. However, the same individuals who were so excited to have Hardy on the roster began to think about what might happen if he did, indeed, make it all the way to the top. Suddenly and quietly, they were half-hoping that he would come out on the losing end of the championship match on the last weekly TNA pay-per-view on September 8 ... and then again in the rematch at Victory Road two months later.

Why, you might ask? For the same reason that Dad wasn't happy to see Bruno with his arm around his precious angel. Hardy doesn't quite fit the part.

TNA is doing everything it can to make a major mark in the world of professional wrestling. Yes, the wrestling is often very good—there is no disputing that. The production quality of TNA broadcasts is also just fine. Many major stars from the United States and around the world have traveled first to Nashville and now to Orlando to compete in a TNA ring, yet the company is still vying to become a legitimate national force, maybe even legitimate competition to WWE someday soon.

Its deal with Fox Sports Net is hardly the best. TNA pays for the time, and

Even more bizarre than the way Hardy is torturing Jarrett with the help of a ladder (above left) is the bright paint that he has all over his face for no logical reason (above right). The man is really strange!



Fans seem to flock to see Hardy wherever he goes, but these fans probably didn't expect him to grab their video camera and start recording. Looks like Hardy's shocked by what he sees as well!

flinch if he saw Triple-H or The Rock on the cover of a sports magazine. Jeff Hardy might be a different story. He has an unusual charisma about him for sure, but you probably don't want to put a microphone in his hand and give him 10 minutes to speak his mind.

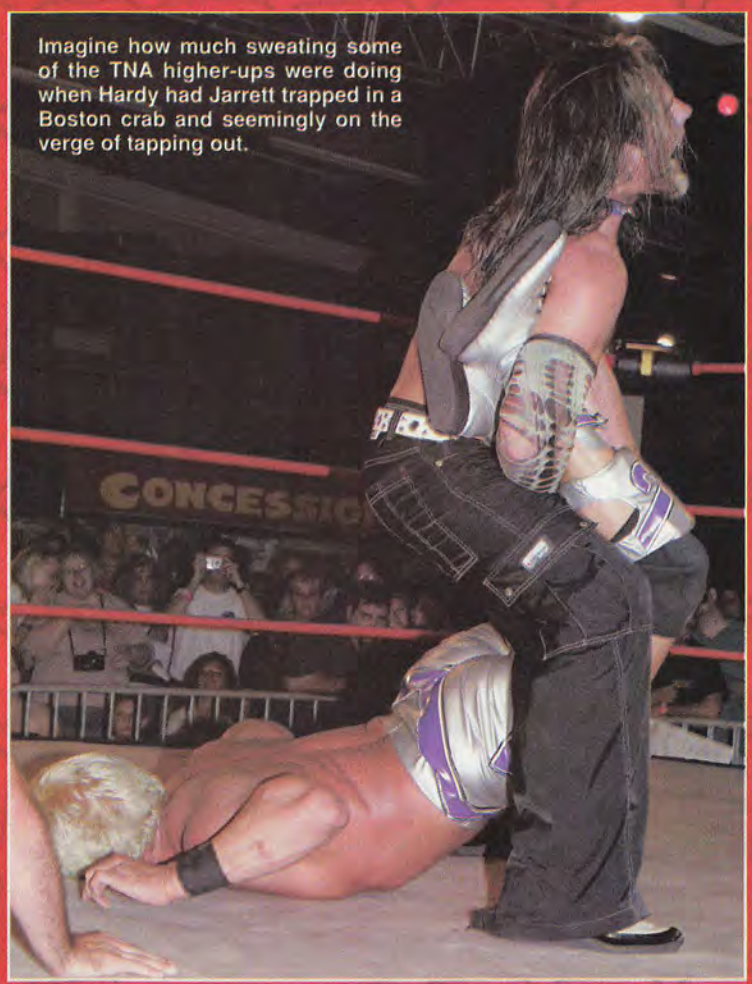
Given this theory, it makes one wonder if TNA has intentionally dashed Hardy's hopes of wearing the NWA crown. He did end up losing to Jarrett on September 8 and at Victory Road. Now, by bringing in competitors such as Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Randy Savage (who's already gone), much of the focus has been shifted away from Hardy. Perhaps by pushing him into the mid-cards of upcoming events, Hardy can be placated with championship matches for the X or tag team titles. He can be an attraction for rather than the focus of TNA. A tag team run with Styles could be outstanding, as could a series of matches against X division champion Petey Williams.

"If it's not gonna be me, I'd love to see Jeff Hardy win the NWA title," said former champion Ron Killings. "Jeff's a good guy. So what if the guy lives by his own rules and doesn't want to wear a tie?"

But isn't that life? Biker Bruno, the love of your daughter's life, could be a brilliant, rich philanthropist with a penchant for classical music and season tickets for your favorite sports team. But can you see past that? Or perhaps the better question is, will you *try* to see past that?

Jeff Hardy shouldn't have to change. His personality and look are both integral parts of what has made him so popular. However, he needs to realize that he is not going to be accepted with open arms by all the "regular" folks that run TNA. He needs to prove his worth to the organization first—just as Bruno has to do with his future father-in-law. The same questions apply. Will he be faithful? Will he stick around when times are tough? Is he someone everyone can depend upon all the time?

Maybe the better question is this: Does Jeff Hardy have the determination, or the patience, to prove himself? □



Imagine how much sweating some of the TNA higher-ups were doing when Hardy had Jarrett trapped in a Boston crab and seemingly on the verge of tapping out.

By Frank Krewda

FILMMAKER WOODY ALLEN once said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to do it by not dying." As funny as that sounds, that's what The Undertaker has tried to do over the course of his career.

No matter how many fans his "undead" persona has won him over the years, 'Taker is at the stage of his career at which leaving the proper legacy is important to him. Clearly, he would rather be remembered for what he did in the ring than merely the character he portrayed.

Indeed, 'Taker's list of in-ring accomplishments is impressive—four WWE World titles, six WWE World tag titles, even a hardcore belt—but even he knows that titles no longer have quite the significance that they had when he broke into the sport. Few fans are likely to recall exactly how much gold he collected. Besides, other wrestlers—some forgotten—have collected more than 'Taker ever will, and none of his title reigns was memorable enough to stand out among everyone else's.

That's not to diminish Undertaker's vast achievements. Rather, it's acknowledgement that the sport has evolved, for better or worse, over the course of UT's career. And that means reaching wrestling immortality now requires more than a compelling persona and collection of title belts.

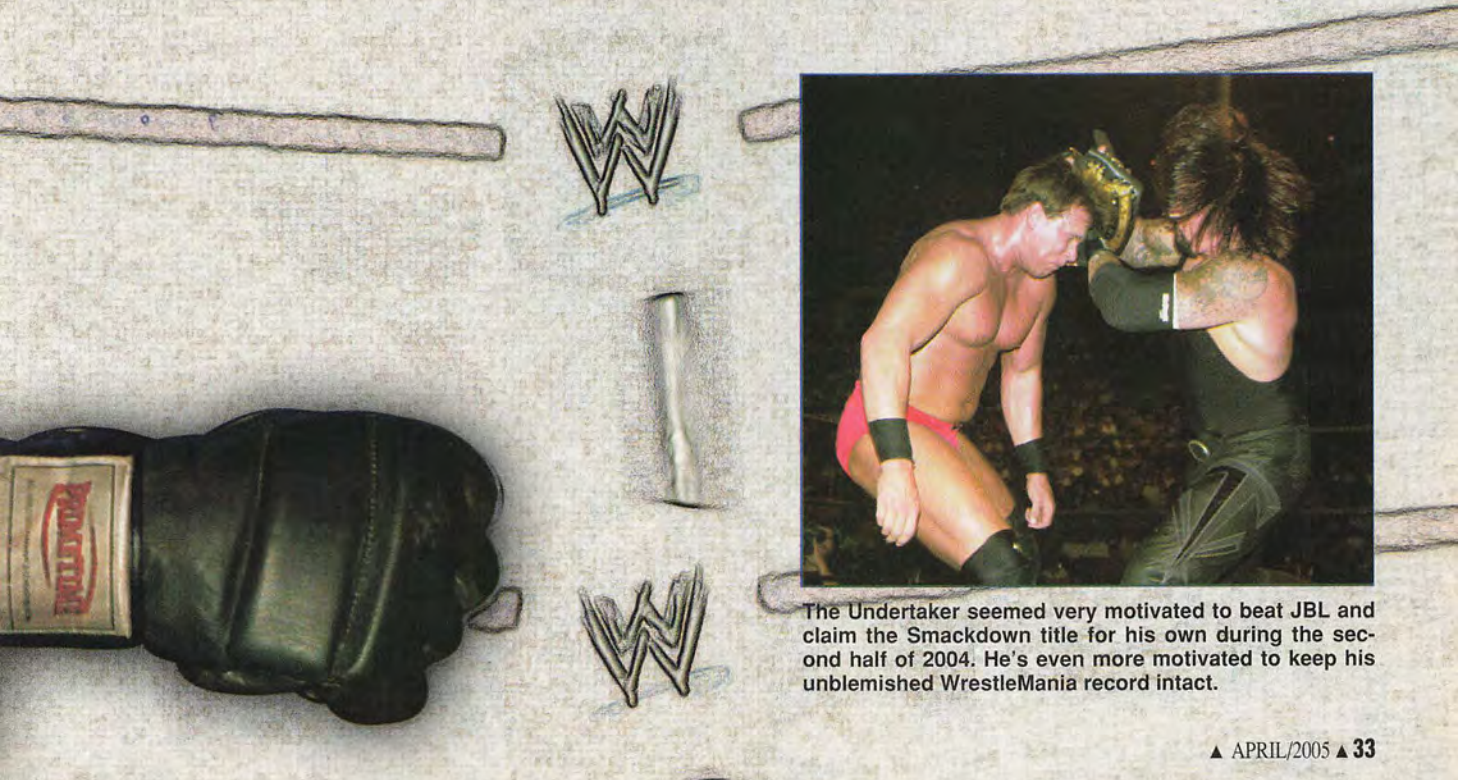
As far as he's concerned, the fastest way for 'Taker to indelibly punch his stamp upon wrestling history is to keep his perfect WrestleMania record intact.

Of all his accomplishments, amassing a 12-0 record in 'Mania matches is his pride and shining joy. "It doesn't matter how great you think you are," he said, "if you can't get it done in the big matches, you ain't worth nothing. There ain't no bigger stage

IF UNDERTAKER DOESN'T WIN AT 'MANIA ...

HE'S DEAD

(FOR THE LAST TIME)



The Undertaker seemed very motivated to beat JBL and claim the Smackdown title for his own during the second half of 2004. He's even more motivated to keep his unblemished WrestleMania record intact.

'Taker amassed a lot of momentum as 2004 turned to 2005 by frustrating the bizarre and unstable Heidenreich (top and above) in match after match. He seemed to be at the top of his game as 'Mania approached.

than WrestleMania. And so far, I'm perfect on the big stage."

Whoever ends up wrestling Undertaker at WrestleMania XX had better be prepared for the fight of his life. WWE sources told *PWI* that 'Taker was training for his unlucky 13th with an intensity and focus not seen in years, and that he had 'Mania on his mind long before even the Royal Rumble card was set.

Eddie Guerrero, who's been loosely allied with "The Dead Man" of late, says The Undertaker's energy is palpable. "The big man is firing on all cylinders, baby," he told *PWI*. "Right now, I'd hate to be the guy who has to face him at 'Mania. Something comes over him when 'Mania rolls around. No wonder he's 12-0. It means everything to him. Now if someone beats him, that could really mess up his head."

Yes, as hard as Undertaker is working to cement his future glory, his match at WrestleMania 21 has serious implications for his current situation. Clearly, UT's not ready for the scrap heap. But after 16 years, the injuries are adding up, and there's an entire generation of younger WWE superstars clawing their way to the top tier. As time marches on, 'Taker's grasp on a spot in the top tier is likely to slip. The best way for him to maintain his iconoclastic status would be to win decisively on April 3 in Los Angeles. Then again, one of the best ways for a star on the rise to make a career would be to beat 'Taker at WrestleMania—any WrestleMania from here on.

Should he go down to defeat, not only would his cherished streak end, his viability as a main-eventer might as well. Should Undertaker lose at WrestleMania, we might be stuffing his career into a casket for the last time.

It's no secret the WrestleMania streak is the fuel that drives The Undertaker's engine. Without the streak to inspire him, 'Taker might find mid-card—or special attraction—status with Smackdown an ignoble and dishonorable ending to a remarkable career. Trying to revive an uninspired athlete in any sport is a difficult and often fruitless venture.

Worse, an unfocused 'Taker could be bad news for Smackdown. Imagine Undertaker heading into WrestleMania 22 with nothing to motivate him other than a chance to make sure he doesn't lose two

'TAKER'S DOZEN

Here's a chronological look at The Undertaker's 12 WrestleMania victories:

1. WrestleMania VII (March 24, 1991): Defeated Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka by pinfall.
2. WrestleMania VIII (April 5, 1992): Defeated Jake "The Snake" Roberts by pinfall.
3. WrestleMania IX (April 4, 1993): Defeated Giant Gonzales by disqualification.
4. WrestleMania XI (April 2, 1995): Defeated King Kong Bundy by pinfall.
5. WrestleMania XII (March 31, 1996): Defeated Kevin "Diesel" Nash by pinfall.
6. WrestleMania XIII (March 23, 1997): Defeated World champion Sid Vicious by pinfall to win the title.
7. WrestleMania XIV (March 29, 1998): Defeated Kane by pinfall.
8. WrestleMania XV (March 28, 1999): Defeated Big Bossman by pinfall in a "Hell In A Cell" match.
9. WrestleMania X7 (April 1, 2001): Defeated Triple-H by pinfall.
10. WrestleMania X8 (March 17, 2002): Defeated Ric Flair by pinfall.
11. WrestleMania XIX (March 30, 2003): Defeated The Big Show & A-Train by pinfall in a handicap match.
12. WrestleMania XX (March 14, 2004): Defeated Kane by pinfall.

It's been three years now since UT took part in a WrestleMania match in which the outcome was truly in doubt. He eventually got the best of Triple-H in a terrific brawl at 'Mania X7. But the last two years have seen him destroy Big Show and A-Train ('Mania XIX) and Kane ('Mania XX).

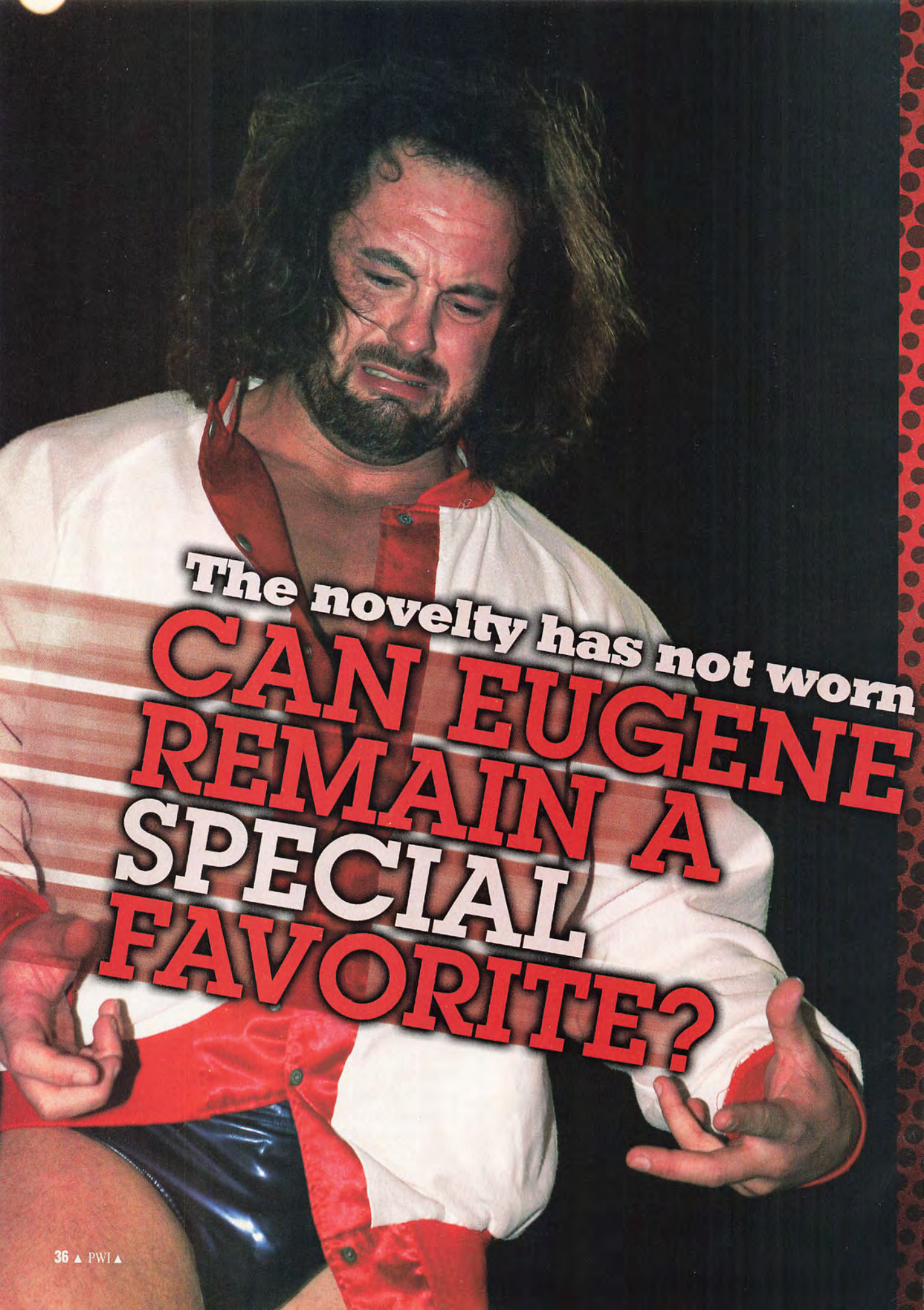
'Mania matches in a row. Without his legacy to fight for, 'Taker could hang on simply to wreak havoc on those who surpass him. As popular as he remains, it should never be forgotten that UT is guided by strange, if not nefarious, forces. We all know whose workshop idle hands are. Unless UT has meaningful matches on which to focus, he could lapse into a streak of senseless violence and cruelty much like what we got from Kane in 2003. It wouldn't be the first time in his career Undertaker let himself get bogged down in meaningless feuds, but it very well might be the last.

> **"The best way for him to maintain his iconoclastic status would be to win decisively on April 3 in Los Angeles. Then again, one of the best ways for a star on the rise to make a career would be to beat 'Taker at WrestleMania—any WrestleMania from here on. Should he go down to defeat, not only will his cherished streak end, his viability as a main-eventer might as well."**

Of course, that's if he loses at WrestleMania, and given the odds, we can capitalize, italicize, underline, and boldface "if." But don't bother 'Taker with talk of odds and worst-case scenarios. "I'm not stupid," he said. "I know what this match means. That's why I'm busting my ass to make sure I win it. But I ain't approaching this match any differently than any other match. I'm just preparing myself to go out there and get my lucky 13th Mania victory."

Going into WrestleMania 21, it's hard to think of any WWE superstar more motivated than 'Taker. Being known as the only major WWE wrestler to post a perfect record at 'Mania obviously has more meaning to him than most could comprehend. What UT should realize is that, win or lose, his legacy in WWE and professional wrestling is secure. His spot in the Smackdown program, that's another matter. □

For obvious reasons, there are a lot of Undertaker fans that want to see his WrestleMania 21 match end with another crunching tombstone piledriver. For not-so-obvious reasons, a few of his enemies might want to see that as well.



The novelty has not worn

CAN EUGENE REMAIN A SPECIAL FAVORITE?

Feuding with Christian over the Raw tag team title—that's probably about where Eugene should be on Raw cards. A novelty act need not and should not become a featured act if he's to last.

thin ... yet

By Will Welsh

IT'S BEEN ALMOST a year since WWE Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff introduced the world to his nephew, a young, mentally challenged would-be wrestler named Eugene. Since that time, Eugene has transcended all our preconceived misconceptions of what a wrestler should be and can be. Despite what most of us would consider his limitations, he's been successful in high-profile feuds with Triple-H and the other members of Evolution, found friends in William Regal, Chris Benoit, and The Rock, and proven himself to be one heck of a capable and entertaining catch-as-catch-can-style wrestler.

Along with Regal, he even became one-half of the Raw tag team champions in November.

Because of all of this, Eugene has become one of the Raw brand's most popular wrestlers. No matter where Raw tours, he receives one of the night's biggest ovations, and the number of Web sites devoted to his career has steadily increased since his debut. For his part, he can't express his appreciation enough. As he makes his way to the ring, he waves wildly toward the stands in an attempt to personally connect with each and every one of his fans. The smile on his face as he steps through the ropes is genuine, almost angelic.

It's hard to believe that someone so innocent and so caring is capable of not only surviving—but prospering—inside a wrestling ring.

The pessimists who cover the sport keep wondering how long Eugene's popularity can last. They claim that he's a novelty, a special attraction whose decline is sure to come sooner rather than later. They say that he can't possibly sustain the momentum that he's enjoyed in the first year of his WWE career, that it's only a matter of time until he gets trapped in an unstoppable downward spiral.

Of course, as the pessimists make these claims, they forget how much Eugene has already overcome. He began by proving himself against Regal in a training ring, and then defeating Robert Conway in his first televised match despite Regal's interference against him. He also retained his popularity after a brutal beating at the hand of Triple-H in a steel cage and a one-sided loss to Snitsky in a hardcore match.

In fact, WWE matchmakers have put Eugene in a number of situations that could have destroyed his momentum, yet Eugene's popularity continues to hold steady. When he wins a match, he's ecstatic. So are fans. When he loses, he knows he tried hard, and he vows to do his best again next time. There doesn't appear to be an end to his run as one of Raw's most beloved fan favorites anytime soon.

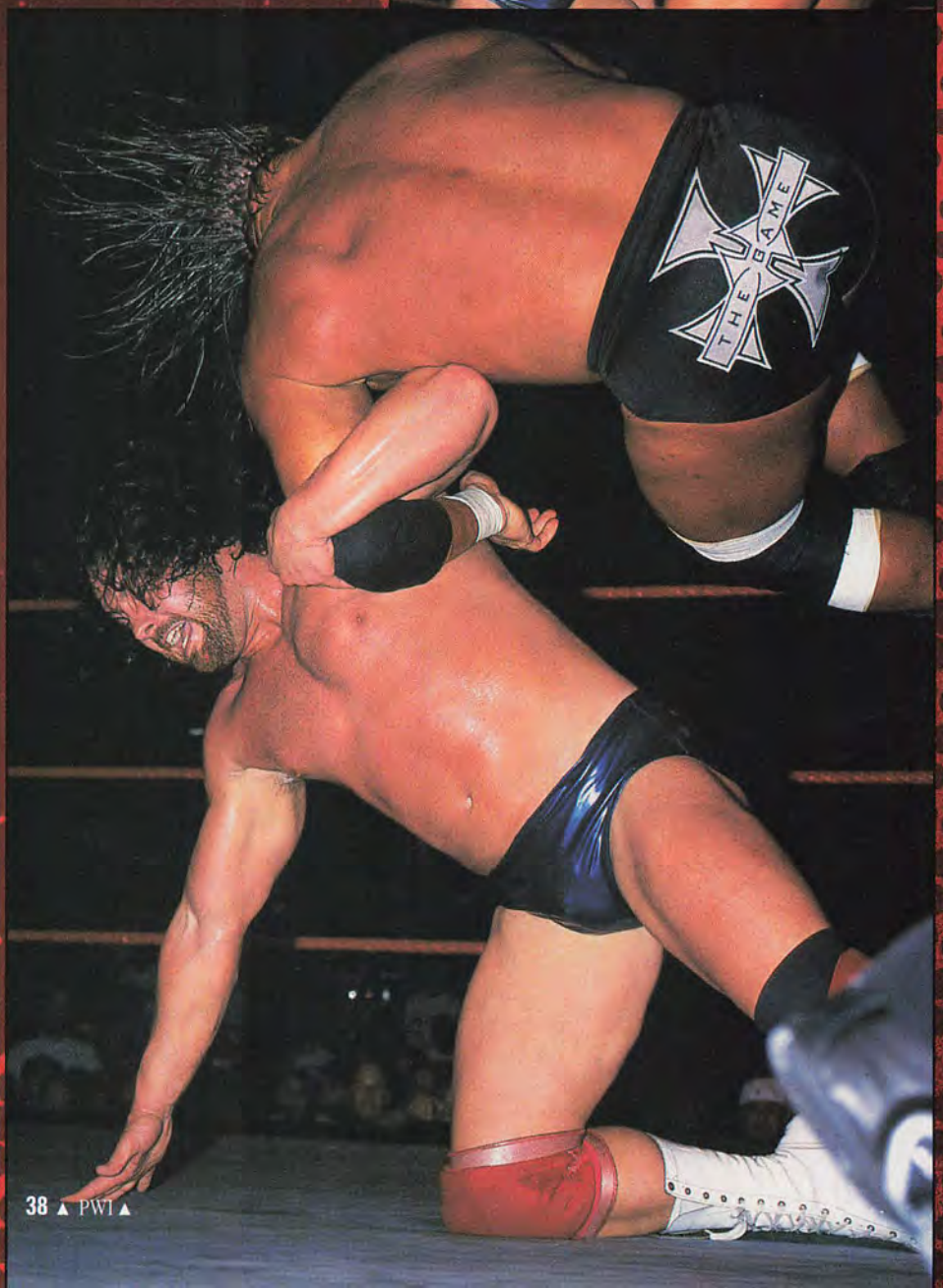
The pessimists, though, beg us to look at history and check out how other wrestlers with personae similar to Eugene's have fared. So to be fair, that's exactly what we did.

The most recent wrestler with a personality similar to that of Eugene was found in WCW back in the mid-1990s. Evad Sullivan, the brother of "Taskmaster" Kevin Sullivan, was a dyslexic (note that Evad is Dave spelled backward), mentally challenged man who often dressed up as his idol, Hulk Hogan. Kevin mentally and physically abused his brother, which was sup-

posed to make him a fan favorite, but even those heinous actions couldn't get WCW fans completely behind him. Occasional team-ups with popular stalwarts such as Hogan and Sting didn't work, either, and now the long-since-departed Evad is a running joke of sorts among long-time followers of the sport. It didn't help him, of course, that he just wasn't a very good or very charismatic wrestler.

However, before we flush Eugene's future, there's another career that we need to examine—that of George "The Animal" Steele.

It was exciting at first to see Eugene challenging and at times dominating Triple-H last summer (right and below). But it quickly became apparent that too much Eugene was not a good thing.



The prime of Steele's career spanned three decades, from the late-1960s all the way up until he retired (supposedly) in 1989. For most of that time, he was one of the sport's most sadistic, hated, and feared men. Younger fans, though, remember him best for his 1980s run with the WWF when, as a simpleton wrestler, he became one of Vince McMahon's most unusual and popular attractions.

Like Eugene, Steele was out of place among the chiseled, beefed up wrestlers of his time. Always weighed down by more body hair than A-Train, a gut worthy of a man who spends many an hour on a bar stool, and a perpetually green tongue, Steele was one of the ugliest wrestlers ever—and in this sport, that's quite a statement.

However, in the ring, "The Animal's" style was just like his nickname suggested. He wrestled like a rabid black bear, all attack, attack, attack. His opponents couldn't prepare a game plan for him, because they had little clue about what moves he would use next. However, they could count on one thing: At some point, he'd forget about them, head for a turnbuckle, and shred it with his teeth.

It wasn't a George Steele match if his furry frame wasn't covered in turnbuckle foam by its end.

By the end of his career, Steele had earned a place in wrestling folklore. Vince McMahon occasionally brought him out of retirement throughout the 1990s, and in 2000, then-WCW Commissioner Terry Funk brought back "The Animal" for a bunkhouse brawl with Jeff Jarrett—a match he won with Chris Benoit's help!

"When he wins a match, he's ecstatic. So are fans. When he loses, he knows he tried hard, and he vows to do his best again next time. There doesn't appear to be an end to his run as one of Raw's most beloved fan favorites anytime soon."

No, George Steele the innocent simpleton, the man who carried around a doll and had a huge and very sweet crush on Miss Elizabeth, didn't win many titles or even encourage many fans to buy tickets to the matches, but he was a solid mid-carder for more years than a lot of people even last in the sport.

George Steele is a member of the WWE Hall of Fame, and not just because he was such a great menacing heel early in his career. His stint as the lovable "Animal" was memorable, too.

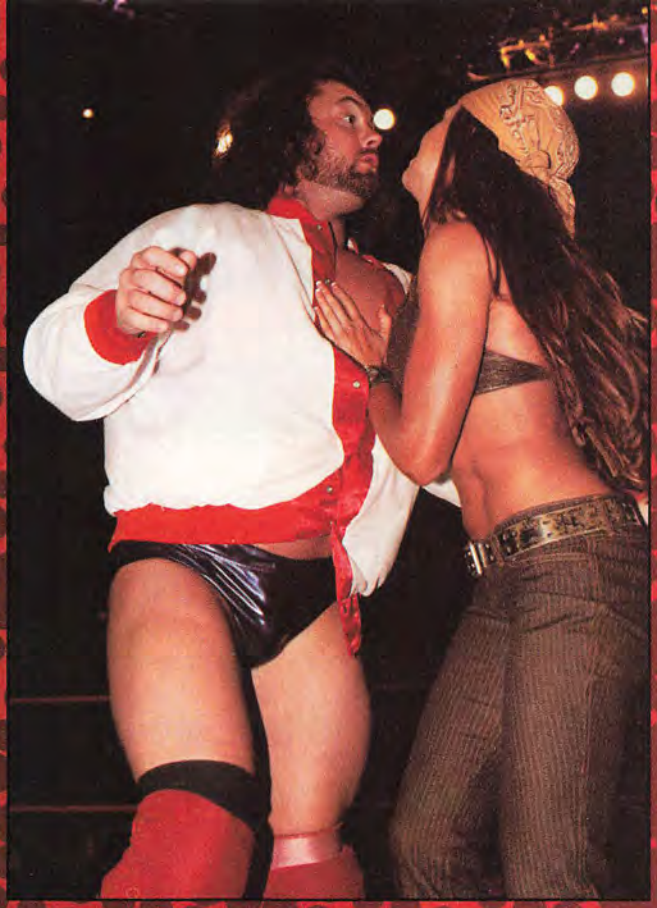
George Steele was an avid reader (above), but he couldn't always keep his facts straight. Evad Sullivan (below) preferred Kluh Hogan to his own brother.

Eugene has a lot of George Steele-type qualities.

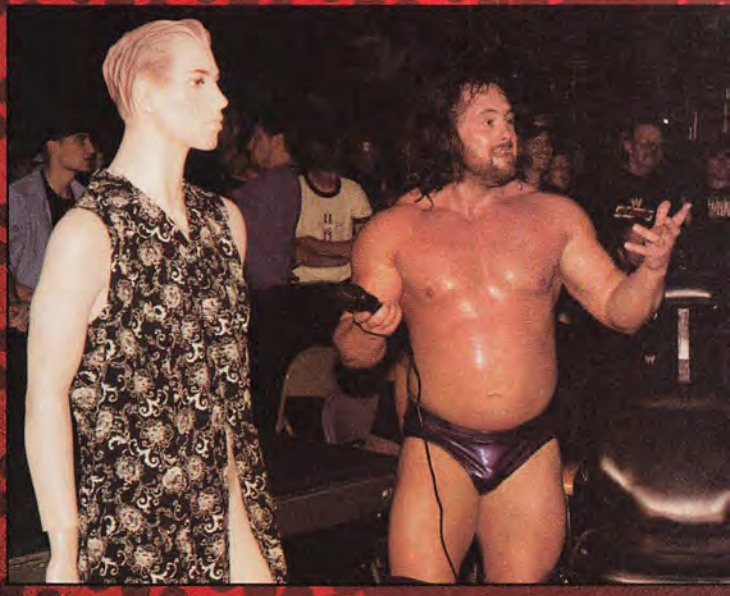
He's hard to game plan for. When wrestling, he's often absent-minded, some might even say day-dreamy. He doesn't go around biting open turnbuckles or showing off his abundant body hair, but he likes parading around the ring, having fun, and wasting time. He doesn't go around dressing up as his favorite wrestlers, but he sure has fun borrowing their finishers. And boy does he stand out.

The biggest thing Eugene has in common with the George Steele of the late-1980s? A love affair with the fans. It's a connection that can't be built or created or designed—it's a connection that either happens or doesn't happen.

With Eugene, it happened—and as long as he's kept in a mid-card role and not overexposed like he was at time last summer, it's just going to keep on happening for a while. Those who don't like it, well, they had better get used to it. □



Watching Eugene fawn over Christy Hemme was priceless (above), as was seeing him with clippers in hand (alongside a mannequin, below) getting ready to shave Uncle Eric bald. He can be a welcome change of pace when many Raw issues get too heavy.



the business page

By Harry Burkett

Breaking down the numbers ... When you read this issue's "TV Breakdown," you'll realize that Vince McMahon should feel fairly good about the upswing in *Raw's* ratings over the past six months. That's just a glimmer of something going in the right direction when so much else—including all of WWE's secondary programs and pay-per-view buy rates—seems to be going in the wrong direction. *Smackdown's* rating is holding steady at an average of about 3.5, whereas *Raw* hovers around the 3.8 mark.

How do these numbers relate to WWE's other boom-and-bust periods? Fifteen years ago, a rating of 3.9 on the USA Network would have been incredible. During the Monday night war five years ago, however, *Raw's* overall rating ranged anywhere from 5.0 to 6.9. And, contrary to popular belief, *Raw's* best numbers came during the McMahon-Helmsley Era storyline, not during Steve Austin's feud with Vince McMahon. *Raw's* ratings tumbled in 2000, when WWE switched most of its programming from USA to Viacom's The National Network, now known as Spike TV. And *Raw* has yet to recover.

Ready for some frightening comparisons? Six months ago, before the ratings surge, *Raw's* numbers were consistent with *WCW Monday Nitro's* in its last, dying days. In its final year, *Nitro* scored an average of 3.0, occasionally slipping down to 2.8 or up to 3.2.

Since the year 2000, *Raw's* overall ratings have dropped by roughly 30 percent. It's gone from the consistently ranked number-one program in all of cable-TV to somewhere in the top five most weeks. Those are still impressive numbers compared to other shows, but WWE has already proven there is potential for so much more.

So the next time you check out "TV Breakdown," you'll be able to put those 3.5s and 3.9s in perspective. Just thought you'd like a refresher.

A Turning Point after Victory Road? And Against All Odds, TNA headed for Destination X. As you might have guessed, Against All Odds is a TNA pay-per-view, which was scheduled for February 13, as is Destination X, slated for March 13. TNA is officially committed to only those two pay-per-views and a third, unnamed PPV on June 19.

With the brand extension—and the addition of an ECW PPV—enabling WWE to hold 15 pay-per-views in 2005, that is a total of at least 18 PPVs (and many more provided TNA remains in business). While that's a far cry from the record 31 pay-per-views the WWF, WCW, and ECW held in 2000, it is a significant increase from the 12 annual events WWE has been promoting in recent years.

Is TNA now an impact player in the pay-per-view industry? To be sure, TNA insiders were delighted by the better-than-expected buy rates for Victory Road—yet the success of that event still wasn't

Vince McMahon takes a lot of criticism these days, but he can be somewhat happy at least with the recent surge in WWE's TV ratings, especially for *Raw*. Heck, Coach can be happy, too.

enough to enable the company to break even for the month.

Panda Energy head Bob Carter, and his daughter, TNA President Dixie, want some evidence that one pay-per-view is building upon another and that TNA will eventually turn a profit. Dixie Carter has reassured everyone in the company that Panda Energy is very committed to the project. But that unnamed June PPV, marking the company's third anniversary, could be the day of reckoning for whether Jerry and Jeff Jarrett's original dream of establishing a national promotion will succeed or fail.

Jail and bail news ... They are far from the most prominent people in the wrestling industry, but TNA's Hector Garza and Carmella DeCesare of WWE diva search fame have created their share of headlines—most of them bad. Fortunately for Carmella, she has emerged from most of her legal problems ... but Garza's trouble might be just beginning.

While going through customs at a Houston airport on January 3, Garza was asked whether he was carrying any medication. Garza said he was carrying prescription medication and handed over two bottles, which contained a total of 28 grams of anabolic steroids, identified as Primobolan and Deca-Durabolin. According to the *Houston Chronicle,* Garza was arrested for possession of a controlled substance. At a January 12 hearing, the presiding judge excused the $1,000 bail that had been set because Garza had already spent nine days in jail. As of press time, it wasn't known whether Garza would be deported to Mexico, but his scheduled match with Scott Hall at TNA's Final Resolution on January 16 was canceled, and Hall got a match with Jeff Hardy instead.

The very next day, Carmella DeCesare was acquitted of a misdemeanor assault charge. DeCasare, the girlfriend of Cleveland Browns quarterback Jeff Garcia, testified that Garcia had cheated on her with 32-year-old Kristin Hine. That led to a confrontation at the Tramp nightclub in Cleveland on August 21. The Associated Press reported that a friend of Hine's dumped a drink on DeCesare, and Hine accused Carmella of grabbing a dance pole and kicking her in the head. DeCesare said she kicked Hine's friend in self-defense, but denied kicking Hine.

TNA had been grooming Mexican star Hector Garza for a major role with the company. Those plans had to be changed, at least temporarily, when Garza was arrested in Texas in early-January.

Although DeCesare, 22, was acquitted of the misdemeanor assault charge, she was convicted of violating a protection order. She was placed on probation for one year and ordered to pay a $150 fine and serve 24 hours of community service.

Somewhere, there was the sound of a few Raw diva rejects laughing.

WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of November 16 to December 31, 2004)

45-Day High: 13.47 on November 22
45-Day Low: 11.26 on December 20
52-Week High: 15.44 on April 2 and 22, 2004
52-Week Low: 11.15 on August 23, 2004

When WWE released its lackluster second-quarter report on November 23, company stock fell by nearly a dollar per share. Compared to the same period the previous year, net profit had plummeted from $17.1-million to $4.5-million—a 74 percent drop.

CEO Linda McMahon accentuated the positive, however, when she spoke at the UBS Media Week Conference on December 6 in New York. McMahon touted WWE 24/7, with its 75,000-hour video library, and the lucrative international market as two potential bright spots. She also confirmed that WWE Productions would be releasing two movies, starring Kane and John Cena, respectively, in the late-summer and early-fall.

WrestleMania's impact on WWE business is well-documented each year, but how much does the industry's premier extravaganza affect local communities? The Enigma Research Corporation recently found that WrestleMania XX generated $13.5-million of economic activity and created the equivalent of 96 full-year jobs in New York City. The average out-of-towner who attended WrestleMania at Madison Square Garden spent an estimated $555 on local goods and services.

In another development, Philip Livingston resigned as chief financial officer on January 6.

TV breakdown

RAW (Spike TV)

November 22: 3.9
November 29: 3.9
December 6: 3.9
December 13: 3.8
December 20: 2.8
December 27: 3.5
January 3: 3.4

Analysis: WWE's decision to make *Raw* its unofficial flagship show is paying off. Throughout a four-week period in November and December, Raw remained in the 3.8 to 3.9 range, a considerable improvement from six months earlier, when the program was foundering in the low-3.0s. Because of its deeper roster and better storylines, *Raw* is slowly beginning to reclaim its reputation as a can't-miss program without harming *Smackdown's* ratings. Having revolving general managers—namely Maven, Chris Benoit, Randy Orton, and Chris Jericho—on the four Mondays immediately following Survivor Series helped the program, in addition to the controversy surrounding the Raw championship. *Raw's* special year-end edition, featuring the brand's best matches from cable and pay-per-view, earned only a 2.8, proving again that there still is no substitute for original programming.

SMACKDOWN (UPN)

November 25: 2.6
December 2: 3.4
December 9: 3.4
December 16: 3.5
December 23: 2.9
December 30: 2.9
January 6: 3.5

Analysis: What happened to all the fun in WWE? Just a few years ago, a Thanksgiving edition of *Smackdown* featured women battling in vats of gravy and ended with a wild free-for-all food fight. In 2004, Michael Cole was talking about John Cena urinating blood after being attacked by Jesus the previous week. While many of the backstage vignettes on the November 25 broadcast had references to Thanksgiving, Creative didn't come up with anything all that festive for the holiday. And, despite the fact that WWE superstars risked their lives to go halfway around the world and perform in a war zone, the December 23 "Christmas In Iraq" edition of *Smackdown* scored only a 2.9, though such a number was to be expected during the holidays. Considering that broadcast ratings represent more households than cable ratings, *Raw* and *Smackdown* remain in a dead heat in terms of the overall numbers game.

VELOCITY (Spike TV)

November 20: 0.6
November 27: 0.6
December 4: 0.5
December 11: 0.6
December 18: 0.5
December 25: 0.5
January 1: 0.4

Analysis: Kansas City sportscaster Steve Romero has joined Josh Mathews on *Velocity,* replacing Bill DeMott, who appears to be set to join Jody Hamilton (The Assassin) and Tim Horner in launching a WWE developmental territory in Georgia. *Velocity* has featured some top superstars in its main events as of late, including The Big Show on the November 20 edition. Interestingly, a long-awaited grudge match between Chavo Guerrero Jr. and Billy Kidman occurred on *Velocity,* not on *Smackdown.*

THE WWE EXPERIENCE (Spike TV)

November 21: 0.5
November 28: 0.7
December 5: 0.4
December 12: 0.4
December 19: 0.3
December 26: 0.4
January 2: 0.5

Analysis: The long holiday weekend might have helped *The WWE Experience* earn a 0.7 on November 28, but the December 19 edition dropped to a 0.3, a truly scary number. Josh Mathews joined Ivory as co-host in December, as Todd Grisham shifted to *Sunday Night Heat* to take over for Al Snow, who was busy with his *Tough Enough* training duties. On the January 2 show, the segment featuring Todd and Ivory's goofiest moments of the year was simply priceless—except for the sight of Grisham in a thong.

SUNDAY NIGHT HEAT (Spike TV)

November 21: 0.9
November 28: 0.9
December 5: 0.9
December 12: 0.7
December 19: 0.8
December 26: 0.6
January 2: 0.8

Analysis: Ric Flair made a rare appearance on the January 2 broadcast of *Sunday Night Heat,* taped on December 27 in Biloxi, Mississippi. The "Nature Boy" forced *Heat* mainstay Val Venis into submission with the figure-four leglock. *Heat* continues to garner respectable ratings, although it has failed to rise above the 1.0 mark in several months. Jonathan Coachman is much more comfortable in the role of color commentator, with Todd Grisham serving as his nerdy straight man.

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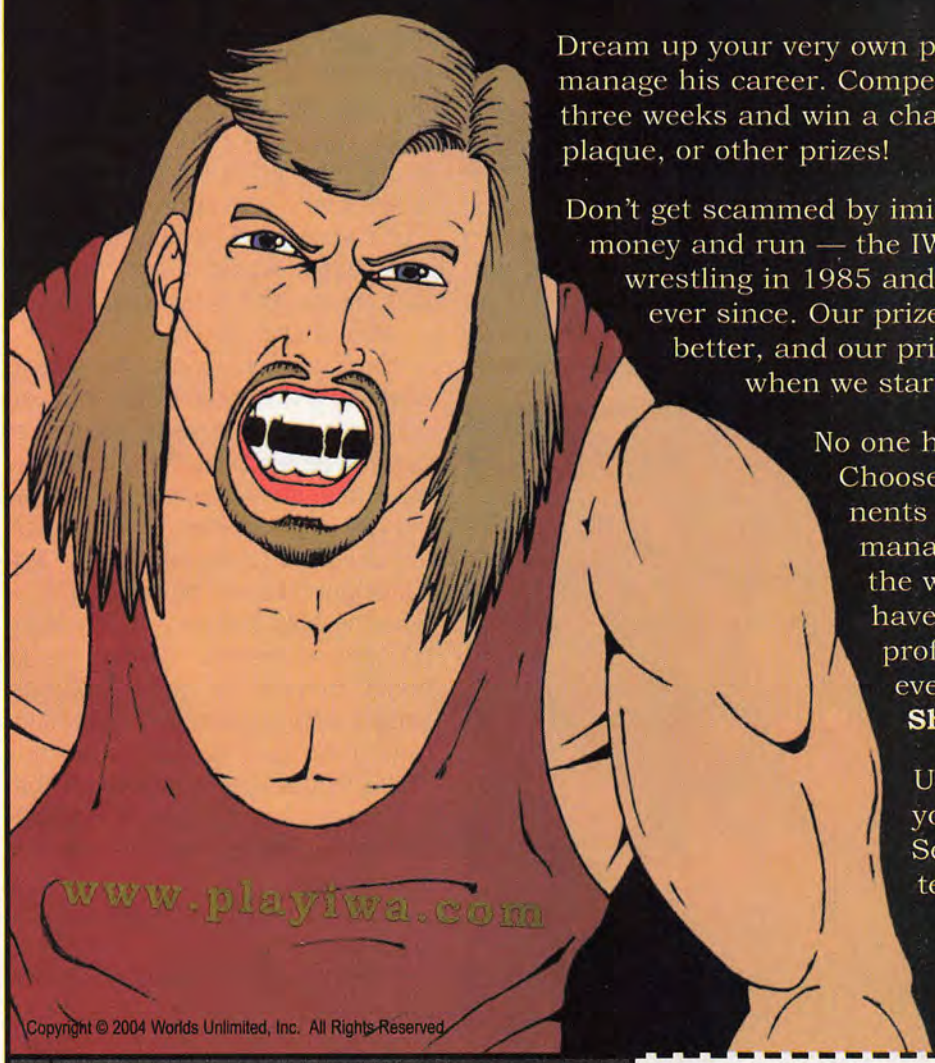

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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Arm drag
3. Arm lock
4. Asian spike
5. Atomic drop
6. Bear hug
7. Bite
8. Body slam
9. Body tackle
10. Bulldog
11. Chicken wing
12. Choke slam
13. Claw
14. Clothesline
15. Cross body block
16. Double axehandle
17. Drop kick
18. Eagle split
19. Elbow smash
20. Eye gouge
21. Face rake
22. Fireman's carry ram
23. Flying body press
24. Flying clothesline
25. Flying drop kick
26. Flying elbow drop
27. Flying head butt
28. Flying mare
29. Forearm smash
30. Foreign object
31. Full nelson
32. Giant swing
33. Grapevine
34. Hair pull
35. Hammer lock
36. Head lock
37. Head stomp
38. Hip roll
39. Irish whip
40. Knee drop
41. Leg lock
42. Leg sweep
43. Manager interference
44. Monkey flip
45. Overhead toss
46. Pole ram
47. Reverse chin lock
48. Rolling scissors
49. Rope burn
50. Russian sickle
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wrist lock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Avalanche
63. Backbreaker
64. Backroll press
65. Belly to belly
66. Big splash
67. Boston crab
68. Brain buster
69. Camel clutch
70. Cobra clutch
71. Cradle
72. Crucifix
73. DDT
74. Figure four
75. Flying leg drop
76. Gourd buster
77. Hurricanrana
78. Moonsault
79. Neckbreaker
80. Piledriver
81. Power bomb
82. Power slam
83. Scorpion deathlock
84. Sleeper
85. Slingshot suplex
86. Spine buster
87. Stunner
88. Sunset flip
89. Superplex
90. Texas cloverleaf

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: *Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: *Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: *Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.*

the steel cage

By Jason Langin

I MISS THE piledriver.

I've been watching wrestling for a long time and have seen lots of holds and maneuvers come and go. Years and years ago, if Brutus Beefcake put you in a sleeperhold, you would be rendered unconscious and become the victim of an unwanted haircut. When was the last time you saw anyone put to sleep? Back in the day, Ric Flair could torture opponents into submission with the dreaded figure-four leglock. Today, I think *I* could escape the figure-four! And let us not forget the *murderous* Funk spinning toehold—*oh,* the agony! If Jake Roberts hit someone with the DDT, that poor guy was laid out for about 10 minutes, just enough time to get a snake jammed in his face. Today, wrestlers blast opponents with DDTs so wicked-looking that Roberts himself would cringe, but victims still kick out at the two-count.

If Jerry Lawler were a lot more active in the ring in WWE, Jason Langin might be able to get his piledriver fix. He understands why a lot of moves and holds made popular in yesteryear have virtually disappeared—just not this brutal one.

What is changing?

Fans are, for one. My wife, who's *not* a wrestling fan, cracks up whenever she sees someone apply a sleeperhold. "Why does he have to wait five minutes to elbow the guy in the stomach?" is the usual question. (Because, honey, Ed "Strangler" Lewis developed this amazing hold that he learned from doctors in France ... give me a break, there is no good explanation.) Certain moves just don't hold fans' interest like they used to. That's why we prefer power bombs to bodyslams, superplexes to basic vertical suplexes, and chair shots to armdrags.

So what happened to the dreaded piledriver?

I don't care what era you grew up watching wrestling in. Can you think of anything worse than jumping into the air and driving your opponent's head directly into the canvas? I can't.

I'll never forget watching "Mr. Wonderful" Paul Orndorff in the 1980s. When he took off his robe at WrestleMania I, I remember commentator Jesse Ventura saying that Orndorff looked like a Greek god. It was true. Hulk Hogan might have had the 24-inch pythons, but "Mr. Wonderful" was ripped. Save for Lou Ferrigno on *The Incredible Hulk*, I had never seen a guy with that kind of physique before.

When Orndorff gave the sign for the piledriver, I would sit up a little straighter on my couch. Sometimes it

looked better than other times. Sometimes I used to wonder if Orndorff hurt himself more than his opponent.

A few years later, I remember seeing Harley Race pull a piledriver out of nowhere in a Heenan Family attack on The Ultimate Warrior. I remember watching him deliver the move so nonchalantly, as if piledriving someone were like delivering a forearm or applying a headlock. You don't just toss piledrivers around, sir, I remember thinking, even if you have won the NWA World title eight times! And what's this? Warrior is still moving? Maybe that wasn't **really** a piledriver.

Harley Race was using his famed piledriver long after his wrestling career ended and his managerial career was in full swing ... although the last time Langin saw Race piledrive someone, he was unimpressed.

It was a while before I saw my favorite maneuver again. (I don't count The Undertaker's tombstone, although I do appreciate that move in its own way.) When Bret Hart first went solo for that initial fan favorite feud against Bad News Brown, he started using the piledriver as his finisher. Seemed like a great idea to me! He had been using the Hart attack double-team with Jim Neidhart for years and didn't have a signature move to call his own. The piledriver was a no-brainer and he was great at it! It even made Orndorff's version look weak.

Now can someone explain to me why a wrestler would trade in the piledriver for the sharpshooter? (Well, you see, in the Dungeon in Calgary, the Harts learned how to stretch people, and the sharpshooter was to honor Stu Hart, the patriarch of the Hart family ... *blah, blah, blah.* Dropping someone on his head is better!)

I did enjoy a couple of good years of watching Jerry Lynn revitalize the move with the added twist of the cradle grip. That move looked awesome—from my vantage point, of course. But I don't get a chance to see Lynn (who's been out with an injury lately) as much as I would like to these days, so I don't get my regular dose of piledriving.

I guess what I am really wondering is how can we have a sport in which a person can be thrown off the top of a cage, power-bombed through a flaming table, and thrown down a flight of steps, but we can't have someone get dropped on his head?

It's ludicrous!

Someone needs to bring the move back. I read in a recent interview with "Diamond" Dallas Page that Jake Roberts told him that the Diamond cutter had become the new DDT. These men both realized that dropping an opponent on his head is a good thing for one's career. Triple-H drops guys on their heads with the pedigree and wins. Randy Orton drops guys on their heads with the RKO and wins. The Dudley Boyz drop guys on their heads with the 3D and win. What are the other guys missing out on?

So here is an open invitation to all current superstars to bring this maneuver back to the forefront of pro wrestling. Edge, the spear is okay, but how about a piledriver? JBL ... clothesline from hell? A clothesline is still a clothesline, but what about a piledriver? That's a move from the fiery inferno. Maven, would you like a piledriver to go with that new attitude? I bet you would!

We wrestling fans don't ask for much. We just like to be treated to quality entertainment that doesn't insult our intelligence. No five-minute bearhugs, no tests of strength, no fake handshakes. Just good matches with solid moves. And if a piledriver isn't solid, then what is?

So let's end with some lines from the classic Koko B. Ware song that sent fans into a frenzy in the late-1980s, a song that immortalizes our favorite move. (Of course, Koko used a brainbuster that he called the ghostbuster instead of a piledriver, but that's another column.)

"Sometimes love, feels just right.
It feels so real.
It feels just like a piledriver.
Yeah—a piledriver." □

win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

AS I WRITE this column, we're only eight days away from President George W. Bush's second inauguration. Most viewers watching the event will be tuning in to see how protesters will impact the festivities, wondering where the high-powered politicians are sitting, or complaining about the amounts of money spent on balls and receptions that evening.

When I watch President Bush being sworn in for a second term, I'll be thinking about pro wrestling.

No, I'm not expecting Kane to shove Chief Justice William Rehnquist aside and give Bush a tombstone piledriver … or a general manager like Theodore Long to come out and announce how he plans to change up the inauguration at the last minute … or Jeff Jarrett to burst through the double doors and accuse the Bush family of nepotism.

Actually, there are many connections between pro wrestlers and commanders-in-chief. And the bogus presidential runs of Bob Backlund and Hulk Hogan don't count. You don't believe me? Check out these links between members of our own wrestling fraternity and the leaders of the free world.

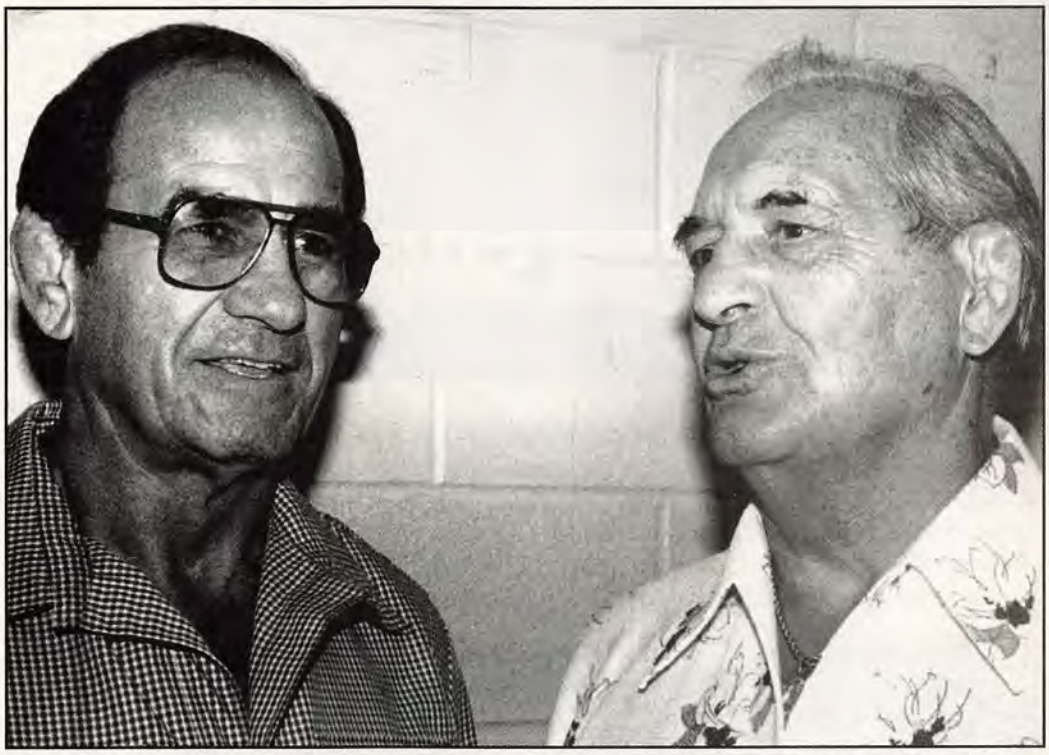
Ric Flair: Some of you might have seen a tanned and smiling "Nature Boy" clapping at Vice President Dick Cheney's acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention. And some of you might know that Flair has been asked to run as the Republican candidate for North Carolina governor on five occasions, but he has rejected those offers, fearing "too many skeletons" in his closet. President Bush himself acknowledged Flair's support on April 5 at a campaign luncheon in Charlotte. "I want to thank Ric Flair, professional wrestler," Bush told the audience. "He's with us today. Big Ric, I'm proud you're here. Thank you for coming. We won North Carolina last time. We're going to win it this time. And I appreciate your help." Whether Flair should receive any credit or not, Bush won North Carolina handily in the 2004 election.

Paul Boesch: Although Boesch was a wrestler in the 1930s, he was Houston's top promoter by the time he met George H.W. Bush. When then-Vice President Bush was slated to throw out the first ball at the Houston Astros' opening game in 1984, Boesch was invited to a private party in his honor. "I was on a tour of New Zealand when I got a phone call telling me about the invitation," Boesch told *PWI* at the time. "You sure better believe that there was no hesitation when I cut my trip short and rushed back to Houston! The Vice President is a true sports fan and, best of all, from my own point of view, he's a wrestling fan as well!" Boesch died in March 1989—only two months after Bush was sworn into office.

"Big Cat" Ernie Ladd had a tremendous career in both pro football and pro wrestling. He's also enjoyed a good relationship with both former President George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush over the years.

Wahoo McDaniel: George H.W. Bush also coached McDaniel in Pony League baseball and attended some of the big chief's matches at the Houston Coliseum in the early-1970s.

In fact, the entire Bush family followed McDaniel's AFL football career with the Chargers, Oilers, Broncos, Dolphins, and, most notably, the New York Jets. The current President Bush has called Wahoo one of his favorite football players.



Lou Thesz was one of the most respected men ever to lace up a pair of wrestling boots, and Paul Boesch was one of the most revered promoters. They had their share of presidential connections.

Ernie Ladd: As it turns out, the Bush family has another favorite football player. Ladd, the gridiron great-turned-pro wrestler is a long-time family friend. The "Big Cat" has been a Republican activist in Texas for many years. Not only has Ladd helped the elder Bush over the decades, but he also formed a close friendship with the younger Bush when he was governor of Texas. Back in March, the 66-year-old Ladd—who was suffering from stomach cancer—was given only three to six months to live. After it was learned that Ladd's cancer had gone into remission late last year, President Bush called Ladd, reportedly saying, "Big man, I heard you were under the weather." Ladd is also a friend of Colin Powell, beside whom he sat at a 2000 presidential debate.

Jesse Ventura: After Ventura "shocked the world" and became Minnesota governor in 1998, there was serious talk about "The Body" running for President someday. Only a few days after the '98 election, President Bill Clinton fielded questions from reporters in the Cabinet Room. When asked for his thoughts on Ventura's election, Clinton replied, "I suppose us politicians are gonna have to hit the gym."

When Ventura was asked what he would do if he ever met President Clinton, the governor-elect said, "I'll keep him in a hammerlock until he tells the truth."

Sgt. Slaughter: As a heel in the Mid-Atlantic area during the early-1980s, Slaughter claimed to have met with President Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office to discuss the communist menace on a regular basis. While that was certainly a bogus story, another one of Slaughter's claims did have the ring of truth. According to Slaughter, he met Richard Nixon during a flight in the mid-'80s, and the former President lauded the ex-Marine for being a first-rate role model for America's youth. Whether Nixon was a closet wrestling fan, or someone on the plane tipped him off, Slaughter was very flattered by the praise.

Mr. Wrestling II: During the 1980 presidential campaign, "The Paragon Of Probity" reportedly went to the Oval Office to visit President Jimmy Carter, who was running for re-election. Carter was a lifelong wrestling fan and was particularly fond of Wrestling II, a fellow Georgia native. *PWI* only half-jokingly remarked, "Rumors immediately began swirling that in the event of a Carter re-election, II would be offered a high-visibility post in the administration, possibly involving one of the many domestic social programs Carter had planned for his second term." Because Carter lost to Reagan that year, we never got a chance to see the first masked member of the Cabinet. Gordon Solie once had what he described as a "helluva conversation" with Carter's mother, Lillian, while both were staying at a hotel. Miss Lillian told Solie that she was a major wrestling fan.

Lou Thesz: Politicians didn't mind getting the rub from the NWA World champion in the 1940s and '50s. Thesz met Harry S Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower before they were elected to the highest office in the land. He was a staunch Republican and a friend of 1964 presidential candidate Senator Barry Goldwater. Thesz even helped a local candidate run for office in Virginia, where the ex-champ lived for the final 25 years of his life. In his final years, Thesz' idea of a fulfilling day was lifting weights, spending time in the tanning bed, and watching the Fox News Channel.

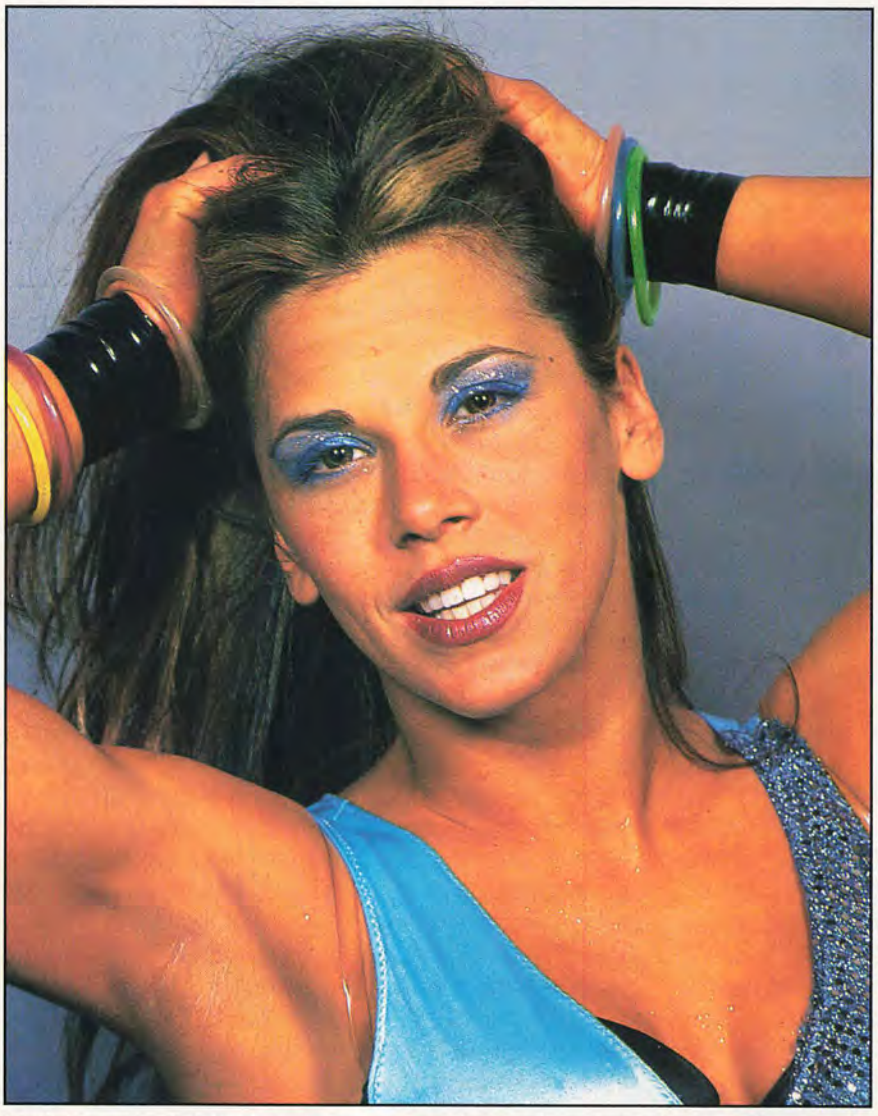
So, as you see, wrestlers and our commanders-in-chief have plenty of shared history. Now, if only President Bush would welcome the winners of WrestleMania to the White House. He let the NASCAR guys park their cars on the White House lawn, didn't he? □

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

WRESTLING FANS IN Louisville are very lucky people.

It's no secret that Ohio Valley Wrestling, located in the heart of Kentuckiana, is WWE's developmental territory and the place where the next wave of WWE superstars are honing their craft. In November, I made the drive down to the new Davis Arena on Shepherdsville Road for the weekly TV taping. My plan was to take a look at the current OVW roster and see who might just be making an impact in WWE in the coming months. Here are my notes.



Alexis Laree is not just beautiful—she has plenty of skill once she steps into the ring. The official Dan Murphy OVW scouting report indicates that with just a little more polish, she'll be ready to make a major impact on the WWE women's division.

Match 1: Vic Dalishus and Deuce Shade vs. Steve Lewington and Mike Taylor.

Short, energetic opener. Dalishus is very good at working the fans, while Deuce emanates intensity. Lewington's a good-looking Brit with freakishly large arms and great facial expressions. Taylor scores the pin with an elbowdrop from the second rope. Good potential for all four guys, but none stood out above the rest.

Match 2: Romeo Roselli vs. Ken Doane.

Roselli starts the match preoccupied with counting his abs—is it possible to sport a 12-pack? Doane is polished and impressive, though he's only 18 years old. People here are buzzing about him. Roselli steals the win after interference from Antonio "The Promise" Thomas. Short, entertaining bout.

Interview segment: Jim Cornette talks it up with OVW heavyweight champion Chris Cage.

Tank Toland and his cousin Chad stole Cage's title belt, and Cage is none too happy. Cage announces he has taken matters into his own hands and reclaimed his belt by force. That brings out Tank in a wheelchair, bandaged from head to toe. Cage claims the "fight" was all of one punch. Cornette rules that since Tank is "injured," Chad must step in for his title matches against Cage. The Tolands have outstanding chemistry, and a segment showing Tank and Chad—in their ring gear—walking through a nearby mall and a McDonald's showing off the title belt is absolutely hysterical. Tank *and* Chad have definite WWE potential.

Match 3: Mike Mondo and Da Beast (with Kenny Bolin and Lulu) vs. Matt Cappotelli and Johnny Jeter.

Mondo is working his giant killer act to perfection, even pointing out a fan's "Godzilla Fears Mondo" sign. Everyone here praises Mondo and wonders why he hasn't gotten the WWE callup yet. Good question. Cappotelli and Jeter are the up-and-

You've seen Melina on *Raw* recently. You probably remember Johnny Nitro from his stint as Eric Bischoff's apprentice. But according to The Murph, if you haven't seen them together in OVW, you've missed something good. He believes Melina, Nitro, and their friend Joey Matthews all belong in WWE right now.

coming tag team, built in the mold of The Rock 'n' Roll Express, or another old Cornette-promoted team, Lance Storm and Chris Jericho. Cappotelli and Jeter seem pretty vanilla, but fans are into them. Cappotelli and Jeter win.

Match 4: Passion vs. Alexis Laree.

I've been looking forward to seeing Laree in person ever since Lita tabbed her as a woman she would like to face in the future. Laree has adopted a Punky Brewster-style gimmick in wild 1980s clothes, including a denim skirt and white tights underneath. Even though she's a fan favorite, the fans can't get enough of seeing her get knocked down. It's absurd how attractive Laree is, but she could still use some improvement in the ring. I'm sure she could hold her own against the WWE divas, but she's not quite as refined she could be. Passion hasn't been wrestling as long, but she's coming along. Jillian Hall and the debuting Melissa Coates run in and lay out both women. Hall has transformed herself from a cute, girl-next-door type into a vamp, and Coates is coming off as a new version of Chyna. It's hard to believe how deep the women's roster is in OVW, especially with WWE chopping down its women's roster.

Match 5: Matt Morgan in a handicap match vs. Robbie Chance and Nick Nemeth.

Morgan is competing under a mask and going by a nickname, "The Blueprint," but still acknowledging his true identity. After Morgan lost the OVW title to Cage, he promised never to show his face in OVW again—hence the hood. Morgan is coming along nicely. He's a stunning physical specimen. His finisher is a vertical suplex that he turns into a uranage (Rock bottom) that is just vicious. Morgan will be back in WWE, and he will be a monster.

Match 6: Joey Matthews and Johnny Nitro (with Melina) vs. Seth Skyfire and Mac Johnson.

Matthews and Nitro have the look and feel of superstars in the making, especially with Melina, who's been seen in a few *Raw* segments, at their side. In something of a surprise, Matthews and Nitro win the match and take the Southern tag title, and I can't wait to see them again. The have excellent execution, speed, and a killer look. Melina's ring entrance can stop your heart cold. I would love to see WWE put these two teams in a pay-per-view match for the OVW Southern tag title, like it did when it matched The Heavenly Bodies against The Rock 'n' Roll Express for the Smoky Mountain tag title at Survivor Series in 1993. Nitro and Matthews have star quality, and I hope WWE recognizes it.

Dark match: Seven (Mordecai) and Chris Masters (with Beth Phoenix) vs. Elijah Burke and Chris Cage.

This is a match for the live audience, without any TV cameras rolling, but all four men are going all out regardless. Masters reminds me of Paul Orndorff. Burke's enthusiasm is infectious, and he could very well show up on WWE TV by the time you read this. Although Cage is the OVW champ at this point, I'm not overly impressed with him. That's not a real knock, I just don't think he's showing his best stuff tonight. Phoenix is a fine wrestler in her own right, but she's also good at riling up the fans. Seven is much more entertaining in this OVW persona than the character WWE Creative created for him. He's actually an awful lot of fun to watch. Cage and Burke score the win.

Overall opinion: Burke, Morgan, Laree, the Tolands, and—if there's any justice in the world—Matthews and Nitro are bound for WWE. And there's a very talented bunch on their heels that's catching up fast. Yes, these fans in Louisville really are the luckiest in the country. □

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You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just *have* to know about this person. Well, these are the 12 questions you'd never think of asking

12 questions

CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

Given the current problems with the airline industry, do you have any good tips for traveling by plane?

The best way to travel is unconscious. Bring a pillow and bring an eye mask. Buy them at Bookstone.

What happened to your hair? It was there just a few years ago.

What do you mean? Oh my God—it *is* gone! If anyone sees it, please e-mail me at christopherdaniels.com and there'll be a substantial reward.

What was your first reaction to the Curry Man character you use in Japan?

What the [expletive deleted]?!?!!?!?!

Curry Man now has a cult following. Why are fans attracted to his spicy goodness?

Because they know that I taste great and I'm good for them. I'm part of a healthy, balanced diet. I'm my own major food group!

Will Curry Man ever make his way to the U.S.?

It'll depend on whether President Bush lifts the curry embargo.

What do you *really* think of the fans?

I think of the fans as my family. Some of them I like to have around, and some I hide in the basement.

You have a choice between Chris Daniels (the stuntman), Trinity (a stuntwoman), and Jim Hellwig to live with on a deserted island for the rest of your life. Which would you choose and why?

Trinity. Just because ...

What will be the first thing you buy when you make your first million dollars?

A razor for C.M. Punk.

You wrestle for TNA. What's up with that Randy Savage guy?

I have no idea. I haven't seen him for weeks.

Do you wish you could have been on *The Surreal Life 4* with Chyna?

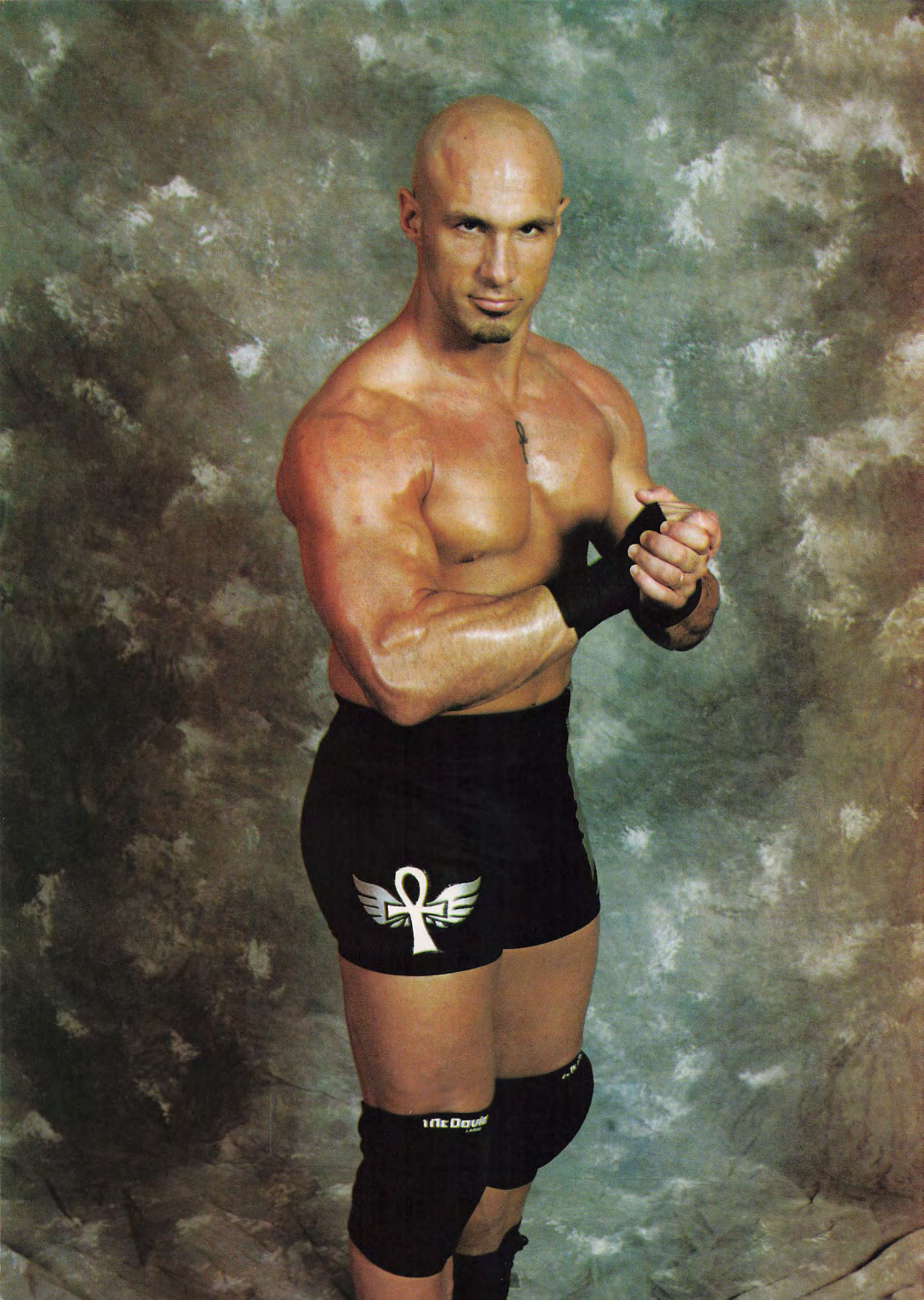
My life is surreal enough without that added pressure.

Here's a sample SAT question for you for no apparent reason. Cargo is being loaded into a shipping container so that the container is being filled at the rate of approximately 2,000 cubic meters per hour. If the empty container is 40 meters long, 10 meters wide, and 30 meters deep, approximately how many hours will it take to fill the container?

Six hours! *[Editor's note: Correct ... really, he got it right even without us offering him four possible answers from which to choose!]* See, I graduated from college! Stay in school, kids! All this and matinee idol looks!

You have a hammer, a midget, and a roulette wheel. What are your plans for the evening?

Find the biggest blender that Wal-Mart makes. □



The Wrestling Observer
Hall of Fame

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

Gorgeous George

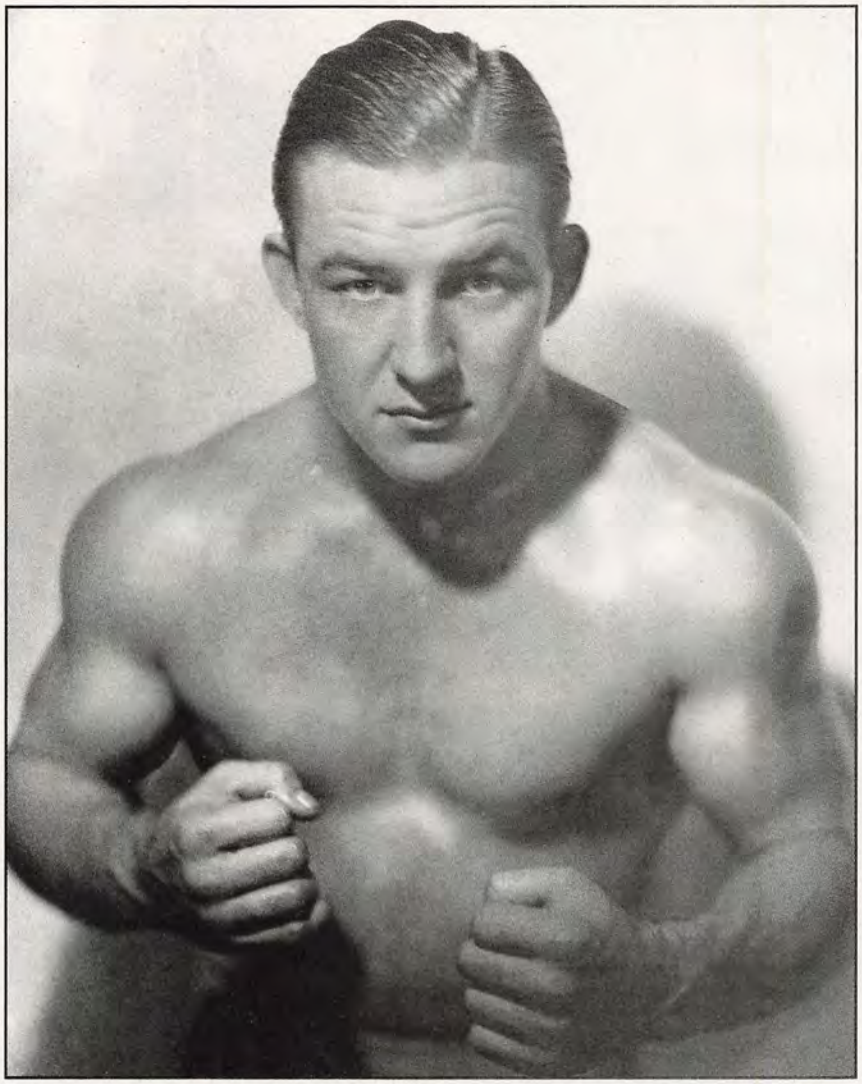
IT HAS BEEN said that Gorgeous George sold more TV sets during the 1950s than any other entertainer, including Milton Berle and Lucille Ball.

While that might not be true, there can be no denying that the man who called himself "The Human Orchid" was the most flamboyant and influential competitor during the Golden Age of Wrestling, the man who single-handedly started pro wrestling on the road to sports entertainment.

Born in 1915 in Seward, Nebraska, George Wagner broke into wrestling during the late-1930s. But at 5'9" and 215 pounds, he lacked the size and strength to break out of the mid-card ranks. After almost a decade of wrestling, Wagner considered retiring before developing the gimmick that would make his career and turn him into a household name.

Wagner grew his hair out and dyed it platinum blond. He began coming to the ring in elegant robes, sporting gold-plated bobby pins in his coiffed locks. Dubbed simply Gorgeous George, he was always accompanied by a valet (usually a man named Geoffrey, although there were others) who sprayed George's side of the ring—and often his opponent—with perfume.

George's antics and effeminate manner enraged fans that had never before seen such a spectacle. Making matters worse, George would constantly cheat, choking opponents behind the referee's back or jabbing them with foreign objects. Although it may have



This photo shows George Wagner before he added "Gorgeous" to his name. He wouldn't exactly have stood out in a crowd when he looked like this.

Once the character transformation was complete, George had to make sure his hair looked perfect at all times. That meant spending a lot of time in the beauty salon!

At least George was man enough to accept the consequences of his loss to The Destroyer in a hair vs. mask match in 1962, even though those consequences were catastrophic to him.

seemed like George had few legitimate wrestling skills, he often would catch opponents off-guard with solid technical maneuvers before reverting back to his rule-breaking ways.

The advent of Gorgeous George came at a time when television was first being popularized. With his over-the-top theatrics, George became a national sensation, one of the first true TV stars in American history. Fans flocked to arenas to see him get his just desserts. When the TV cameras weren't rolling, George lost plenty of those matches. But Gorgeous George remained as egotistical as ever, and fans never tired of seeing him humiliated.

The most prominent title George held was the AWA (Boston) heavyweight championship, which he won on May 26, 1950, from Don Eagle. He went on to lose that to Lou Thesz in a bout pitting wrestling's greatest showman against its greatest pure athlete.

The final big feud of George's career was against The Destroyer; it ended in a mask vs. hair bout that saw George's trademark blond locks sheared off to the delight of the crowd. George died in 1963, just months after he retired from wrestling. He was 48.

Unlike most wrestlers, Gorgeous George isn't remembered for titles he won or matches he had. He is remembered for the character he created and for the way he injected entertainment into wrestling. The list of wrestlers he influenced is huge and includes Ric Flair, Randy Savage (who adopted George's ring music of "Pomp And Circumstance" as his own), Buddy Rogers, and Superstar Graham. Even Muhammad Ali, Little Richard, and Liberace admitted that they stole elements of the Gorgeous George character and made them their own.

He is a charter member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame. □

Crowds always went crazy whenever any of his opponents—here it's Edouard Carpentier—had the chance to beat the arrogance out of George.

independent roundup

By Liz Hunter

The year 2004 sure was a great one for Austin Aries. Winning the Ring of Honor title from Samoa Joe is no small feat. Will he be able to hold it anywhere near as long as Joe?

AUSTIN ARIES TOPPED off his breakout year of 2004 by ending the 19-month Ring of Honor title reign of **Samoa Joe** on December 26 in Philadelphia. Much of the wrestling world became aware of Aries in April, when he made it to the finals of the Super 8 Tournament before losing to **Christopher Daniels**. From there, he moved on to ROH and started his steady march to the title. It should be interesting to see how a much smaller champion (Aries weighs just 202 pounds) will fare in the ultra-competitive promotion. It should also be interesting to see what Samoa Joe does now that he's an ex-champion.

On the same show, **Low-Ki** punched referee **Sean Hanson**, resulting in an indefinite suspension from ROH, so that's one man Aries won't have to worry.

More than 700 fans packed the Diamondback Saloon in Belleville, Michigan, for a benefit show for **Sabu**. Stars from Border City Wrestling, TNA, and WWE were on hand to raise money and pay homage to the "homicidal, genocidal superstar." On the show, **A-1** defeated BCW heavyweight champ **D-Lo Brown** to win the title. The final bout saw **Shane Douglas** take on **Raven**, with **Mick Foley** serving as special referee. Sabu used Mr. Socko on Raven to help knock him out. Douglas and Foley then teamed up to put Raven through a table, which led to Douglas scoring the pinfall. TNA stars **Chris Sabin** and **Abyss** didn't wrestle, but were on hand to sign autographs. The highlight of the night was a touching, simple speech by Sabu, who, breaking character, simply said, "Thank you."

Pittsburgh area wrestler **Dennis Gregory** has been called over to Iraq on a military assignment. Gregory wrestled his final match, a loss to **Jimmy Vegas**, on the December 11 International Wrestling Cartel show. Also on the card, long-time wrestling announcer **Jeff Gorman** announced his retirement.

NWA New Jersey has named **Marc Coraluzzo** its new chairman of the board. Marc is the son of the notorious **Dennis Coraluzzo**, who died in 2001. As a teenager, Marc often worked alongside his father for the NWA, learning all aspects of the business ... NWA Oklahoma star **Tim Warcloud** will have a hand in the *Mil Mascaras vs. The Aztec Mummy* movie. Filming started in December 2004 in Columbia, Missouri, and Mexico City. Warcloud will serve as stunt coordinator for the U.S. filming of the movie, which is scheduled to be released later this year.

"Bone Crusher" Fred Sampson won the IWF's Tournament of Champions, defeating **Biggie Biggs**, **Roman**, and **Shane O'Brien** in a fatal four-way on December 19 in Paterson, New Jersey ... **Ultimo Dragon** resurfaced in December, but he didn't fare well. First, he wrestled in California for the New Japan Inoki Dojo show in Cudahy, teaming with **Durango Kid** and **Jose Maximo** in a losing effort against **Vampiro** and **The Havana Pit Bulls.** Then Dragon teamed with **El Fuego** on a Fusion show in Elizabeth, New Jersey, losing to **Joel** and **Jose Maximo**.

Quick title changes: New Millennium Wrestling, Rutherford, NJ, December 26: **Vic Divine** beat **Crowbar** to win the heavyweight title ... **The Solution** beat **Hot 'N' Sexy** to become the inaugural tag team champions ... ***Columbia Wrestling Alliance, Columbia, TN, December 25:*** **Shane Morton** won a 20-man battle royal for the heavyweight title ... ***Impact Zone Wrestling, Tempe, AZ, December 22:*** **Team Elite** defeated **Navajo Warrior** and **The Crock** to become the new tag champs ... **Peter Goodman** defeated **Lawrence Tyler** to become the new heavyweight champion ... ***Crossroad Championship Wrestling, Terre Haute, IN, December 19:*** **Elektra Fine** defeated **Danielle Cash** and **Jezzie Bell** to win the women's title ... ***Midwest Wrestling Alliance, Coldwater, MI, December 19:*** **BAM** defeated **Jack Thriller**, **Johnny Dynamo**, and **Jayson Quick** to become the new Price of Glory Grand champion ... ***IWA Flashfire, Hartwell, GA, December 18:*** **Chris Vanadore** and **Big Country** beat tag team champs **Buford T** and **Tow Truck** to win the title ... ***NWA Pro Wrestling Express, McKeesport, PA, December 18:*** **Spyral** defeated Three Rivers champion **Chris Taylor** and **Justin Idol** in a three-way elimination match to win the title ... ***Professional Championship Wrestling, Arlington, TX, December 18:*** **Steve DeMarco** beat **Hotstuff Hernandez** in the finals of a tournament to declare a new heavyweight champion ... ***World Class Extreme Wrestling, Hamlet, NC, December 18:*** **Tre G** defeated New Class champion **Hangtime** to win the title ... **Aaron Devil** and **Charlie Dreamer** defeated tag champs **DJ P-Roc** and **Dr. Love** to win the title ... ***World of Hurt Wrestling, Hudson Falls, NY, December 17:*** **Steve Kruz** won a battle royal to become the first TV champion ... ***Xtreme Championship Wrestling, Denton, TX, December 17:*** **Scott Phoenix** pinned ironman champ **Kit Carson** in a no-rope, barbed-wire match to win the title ... ***WPW, Black River Falls, WI, December 11:*** **Tejas** defeated **Mad Wolverine** to win the U.S. title ... ***Midwest Powerhouse Wrestling, Jerseyville, IL, December 11:*** Co-hardcore champion **Xavier Frost** beat co-hardcore champion **Dan Walsh** in a first-blood match to take complete control of the title ... **Christian Haze** pinned heavyweight champion **The Searcher** to win the title ... ***New England Championship Wrestling, Framingham, MA, December 11:*** **Chris Venom** beat heavyweight champion **Michael Sain** to win the title ... ***Combat Zone Wrestling, Philadelphia, PA, December 11:*** **Sonjay Dutt** beat junior heavyweight champion **M-Dogg 20** in a loser-leaves-CZW match for the title ... **B-Boy** defeated ironman champion **Chris Hero** to win the title ... **Team Cash** beat tag team champions **Blackout** to win the title ... ***International Wrestling Cartel, Wilmerding, PA, December 11:*** **Sterling James Keenan** beat **Petey Williams**, **John McChesney**, and **Josh Prohibition** in an elimination match to win the vacant Super Indy title (previous champ **Chris Sabin** was forced to vacate the title due to a back injury) ... **Bobby Eaton** and **Dennis Condrey** beat tag team champions **Tracey Smothers** and **Chris Hamrick** to win the title ... **Shirley Doe** beat heavyweight champ **Mahoney** in a streetfight to win the title ... ***KYDA Pro Wrestling, Blue Ridge Summit, PA, December 11:*** **The Flying McIntyres** beat tag champs **Billy Johnson** and **Mudge Johnson** to win the title ... ***Professional Championship Wrestling, Arlington, TX, December 11:*** **Brett Barnes** beat TV champ **Steve DeMarco** to win the title ... ***Jersey All Pro Wrestling, Rahway, NJ, December 10:*** **The Christopher Street Connection** beat **The Solution** to become the tag team champs ... **Azrieal** beat light heavyweight champion **Jay Lethal** to win the title. □

Here are your new Jersey All Pro Wrestling tag team champions: The Christopher Street Connection! Mace and Buff-E are tougher than their diva personae lead one to believe.

the international report

By Mike Spillane

IT WAS JUST a few months ago that **Kensuke Sasaki's** career was on the verge of being talked about in the past tense. Since then, he's won the IWGP heavyweight title and again become a featured player all over the *puroresu* scene. As a result, he scored top honors as Tokyo Sports MVP in the annual 2004 balloting among Japanese fans. Those year-end awards also gave high praise to **Kenta Kobashi**, the Pro Wrestling NOAH GHC champion, for his stellar matches throughout the year. Kobashi most recently defended his title against the **Mike "The Gladiator" Awesome**, and has been unstoppable since his title win over **Mitsuharu Misawa** in March 2003. The Fighting Spirit award, essentially a consolation prize for someone not quite worthy of taking MVP honors, went to New Japan's **Hiroyoshi Tenzan**, who beat Sasaki for the IWGP belt on December 12.

Shinya Hashimoto's Zero-One promotion is no more. Citing financial problems and his need to undergo major shoulder surgery, Hashimoto folded the company in December, although the good news is Shinjiro Otani stepped in and started his own (very similar) version of Zero-One.

Zero-One Fighting Athletes, the promotion operated by **Shinya Hashimoto**, ceased operations in December 2004. Hashimoto revealed at a press conference that the company was in major debt, and with his impending hiatus for a much-needed shoulder operation, he felt that the responsible choice would be to fold the promotion. With Hashimoto injured, and other top star, **Naoya Ogawa**, preoccupied elsewhere, attendance at recent Zero-One tours had bottomed out.

The company's next biggest star, **Shinjiro Otani**, has elected to pick up the pieces, and has launched Zero-One Max, a similar company, as the name implies. The members of the regular Zero-One Fighting Athletes roster have joined Zero-One Max, and they are continuing to tour, using the same venues and even the same ring as the prior incarnation of the company.

In Mexico, the year-end awards gave a long-overdue nod to the original **La Parka**, now known as **L.A. Park**, for Best *Technico*. A widely viewed television award show has mistakenly named AAA's bogus La Parka the top Luchador in Mexico for several years, but *Box Y Lucha* magazine set it right this time around. Best *Rudo* honors went to perennial star **Dr. Wagner Jr.**, who, since the death of his famed father, has actually become something of a sympathetic fan favorite. **Ultimo Guerrero** and **Rey Bucanero** won for Tag Team of the Year, making it a clean sweep for CMLL wrestlers in the key categories. The year's Best Newcomer, according to *Box Y Lucha,* **Mistico**, may be a new name, but the man behind the mask is no rookie. Prior to his days as Mistico, he was **Astro Boy** for CMLL. He's enjoyed much more success with his new persona and has become a headline attraction at Arena Mexico in record time.

Rocky Romero, one-half of Ring of Honor tag team champions **The Havana Pit Bulls**, has been busy of late—especially in Mexico. The young star recently recaptured the CMLL super lightweight title (he held the title in the autumn of 2003 as well), and in the same week, went on to win the Toryumon's Young Dragons Cup Tournament in Naucalpan. Romero, who also regularly competes for New Japan Pro Wrestling, has been

impressing fans everywhere he goes with his crisp, brutal offense and no-nonsense style.

Another rising star on the international scene is Germany's **Steve Douglas**. Douglas first appeared on the European map when he won the wXw German lightweight championship from American independent **Mike Quackenbush**. Since then, he's had breakout matches opposite men like **Super Dragon** and a host of European standouts, and has turned into the "it" guy in the Germanic countries. He's aided by his sultry valet, **Shadow**, who manages to supply ample distraction during the course of his title defenses. Douglas' next step is to tour the United States and see if he can equal or surpass his European success.

Puerto Rican fans got an explosive gift for Christmas this year, as former WWF star **Savio Vega** returned to action under his original ring persona, **TNT**. Vega has been active with **Victor Quinones'** IWA for some time, but has slowed down his career as a wrestler in favor of taking on more backstage responsibilities. He returned as TNT to team with **Invader I**, opposite **Thunder** and **Lightning**, in a quest to win the IWA tag team title. It looked like Invader had things well in hand, but before he could execute his devastating heart punch, TNT turned against him and left him laying with a superkick. Whether Vega will continue to wrestle, as himself or under the TNT guise, is not known. Invader I, who has never held the IWA tag title, will be looking for a new partner to help him fulfill his championship goals, as well as to exact revenge if at all possible.

The Internet Wrestling Syndicate, a promotion based in Montreal, is starting to garner a cult following. Its regular attendance figures make a lot of American independent companies blush, and it's had success with an odd mix of adult content and high-risk wrestling. Top stars like **El Generico**, **Sexxxy Eddy**, and **Kevin Steen** have begun to pop up all over the North American scene while the company continues to grow. It recently began cooperating with some of the more prominent American independents, like California's Pro Wrestling Guerrilla and Pennsylvania's Combat Zone Wrestling. The group's most recognizable face, **Pierre Carl Oulette**, was one-half of WWF tag team champions **The Quebecers** a decade ago and has previous experience everywhere from WCW to TNA (where he competed simply as **X**). He is currently challenging **Franky the Mobster** for the heavyweight title.

Grand Prix Championship Wrestling, a new Mexican promotion, opened for business in December. Owned by **Juventud Guerrera**, it brought together talent from all over the independent scene, Japan's NOAH (for which Guerrera sometimes tours), and Mexico's AAA. The result was an impressive turnout for the debut event, which saw **Konnan** return to action in Mexico City after many years abroad. The 1,700 fans in attendance were also treated to a match showcasing outstanding junior heavyweight tag team **KENTA** and **Naomichi Marufuji**, who are often the highlight performers on the slower, heavyweight-dominated NOAH shows.

This is how Savio Vega looked as TNT when he was carving up Carlos Colon in barbed-wire matches in Puerto Rico in the early-1990s. Vega recently came out of semi-retirement and rediscovered his old persona, although the IWA's Invader I probably wishes he hadn't.

Unfortunately, an in-ring mishap in that tag match, pitting the Japanese duo against Juvi himself and regular partner **Mr. Aguila**, marred the event. Aguila, attempting to fly through the air and kick one of his opponents trapped in the corner, aimed a little too high and soared over the corner and onto the metal post, breaking his leg in disturbing fashion. The match was stopped on the spot, and Aguila was tended to by the ringside physician. The match earned rave reviews, save for the accident, and a rematch is in the works for somewhere down the line.

Even with the injury to Aguila and the increased pressure on Guerrera to remain in Mexico for GPCW, NOAH won't be shorthanded when it comes to Lucha talent. In addition to regular **Ricky Marvin** (who splits his time between NOAH and CMLL), upstart promotion ENESMA will be sending high-flyer **Turbo** to NOAH starting in early-2005. Turbo, a protege of Mexican veteran **Skayde**, has been called the next **Rey Misterio Jr.** by some Lucha periodicals, setting the bar high for this exciting rookie. □

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Spotlight Card of the Month

UNIONDALE, NY—*WWE Sunday Night Heat* taping/*Raw* live broadcast at the Nassau Coliseum: **Chris Masters** defeated **Chris Cage** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **Val Venis** ... **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** defeated **Slyk Wagner Brown** & **Johnny Heartbreaker** ... **Rhyno** pinned **Danny Doring** ... **Tajiri** beat **Steven Richards** ... **Batista** pinned **Chris Benoit** ... **Edge** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** defeated **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Trish Stratus** pinned **Victoria** ... **Christian** defeated **Eugene** ... **Randy Orton** pinned **Triple-H**.
(01-03-05)

UNITED STATES

ARIZONA

GLENDALE—WWE at the Glendale Arena: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** defeated **Christian** & **Tyson Tomko** ... **Tajiri** pinned **Val Venis** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **The Hurricane** ... Women's champion **Lita** beat **Trish Stratus** ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **Edge** ... **Muhammad Hassan** pinned **Rhyno** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** beat **Kane** and **Gene Snitsky** by countout in a three-way match ... **Batista** defeated **Chris Jericho** in a last-man-standing match ... **Randy Orton** pinned **Triple-H**.
(12-28-04)

—Jerry Mitchell

TEMPE—Impact Zone Wrestling at The Sets: **Antonio Mestre** defeated **Lucha Reigns** and **Mr. Arrogance** ... **Morgan** & **Kharma** defeated **Adrinalyn** & **Tommi Kyle** ... **Lil' Nate** defeated **Ryan Lynch** ... Heritage champion **G.Q. Gallo** defeated **Hollywood** ... **Team Elite** defeated tag champs **Navajo Warrior** & **The Crock** to win the title ... **Peter Goodman** defeated heavyweight champ **Lawrence Tyler** to win the title.
(12-21-04)

—Henry Faust

CALIFORNIA

CUDAHY—New Japan Pro Wrestling Toukon 7 at the Portero Restaurant & Nightclub: **Adam Pearce** beat **Sinn** ... **Webster Dauphiney** beat **Yoshida** ... **Sara del Rey** beat **Nikki** ... **Vampiro** & **The Havana Pit Bulls** defeated **Ultimo Dragon**, **Durango Kid**, & **Jose Maximo** ... **Giant Machine III** & **Eric Marlock** beat **Tommy Williams** & **Jose Moreno** ... **American Dragon** wrestled **James Gibson** (formerly **Jamie Noble**) to a draw ... **Takemura** & **Osamu Nishimura** beat **Chad Malenko** & **Samoa Joe**.
(12-12-04)

—Gina Lytle

DELAWARE

DOVER—Maximum Championship Wrestling at Simon Circle Boys' and Girls' Club: **Billy Johnson** pinned **Lance McIntyre** ... **James** beat **Brandon Mercury** ... **Jason Marks** beat **Stacy Adams** ... **Adam Ugly** pinned **Trey Webber** ... **C.A. Elliot** pinned **Joseph Brooks** ... **Shaka** pinned **Eric Chapel** ... **Jimmy Dream** beat **Asian Sinsation** ... Heavyweight champ **Aken Pembrooke** won a three-way match against **Massive Mike** and **Tristan Spade**.
(12-18-04)

—Moe Olsen

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WASHINGTON—WWE at the D.C. Armory: **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Jesus** ... **Heidenreich** pinned **Nunzio** ... Cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** defeated **Billy Kidman** and **Paul London** in a three-way match ... **Funaki** beat **Orlando Jordan** ... **The Big Show** defeated **Mark Jindrak** & **Luther Reigns** in a handicap match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** beat **Charlie Haas** & **Rob Van Dam** ... **Jackie Gayda** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** defeated **Booker T** and **Eddie Guerrero** in a three-way match.
(11-20-04)

—Erin Josephs

FLORIDA

ORLANDO—WWE at the T.D. Waterhouse Center: **Eddie Guerrero** & **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **The Basham Brothers** ... **Orlando Jordan** defeated **Hardcore Holly** ... Cruiserweight champion **Funaki** beat **Spike Dudley** and **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a three-way elimination match ... **Jackie Gayda** beat **Dawn Marie** in a best body contest ... **The Big Show** defeated Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** by disqualification ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Kenzo Suzuki** ... **Booker T** & **Charlie Haas** defeated **Mark Jindrak** & **Luther Reigns**. In accordance with a prematch stipulation, **Kurt Angle** then had to kiss Booker T's butt ... **The Undertaker** beat **Kurt Angle** in a casket match.
(01-09-05)

—Rob Willard

LAKELAND—Full Impact Pro at Latino's: **Spanky** won the Florida Rumble ... **Antonio Banks** beat **Erick Stevens** ... **Mike Shane** defeated **Kahagas** ... **Vordell Walker** defeated **Azrieal** ... **Eddie Vegas** defeated **Sal Rinauro** ... **Scoot Andrews** & **LeDuke Jakes** defeated **The Heartbreak Express** ... **Jimmy Rave** defeated **Steve Madison** ... **Rod-**

Simon Dean can say that a can of his fitness powder helped him defeat Val Venis in this match taped for *Heat*—quite literally. He used his dubious product as a weapon!

erick Strong defeated **Jerrelle Clark** ... **James Gibson** defeated **C.M. Punk** ... Heavyweight champ **Homicide** beat **Spanky**.
(12-18-04)

—Will Compagne

GEORGIA

CORNELIA—NWA Wildside at the NWA Arena: **Don Juan** & **Chris Marvel** beat **Anthony Henry** & **Randall Johnson** ... **Todd Sexton** beat **Masada** ... **Biohazard** & **Rampage** beat **Shadow Jackson** & **Nemesis** ... **Ace Rockwell** & **Shaun Tempers** beat **Rainman** & **Azrael** ... **Mikal Adryan** beat **Brandon P** ... **Onyx** beat **Jeff Lewis** ... **Salvatore Rinauro**, **Fast Eddie**, **Seth Delay**, & **Jimmy Rave** beat **Sal** & **Vito Thomaselli**, **Slim J**, & **Jay Fury**.
(12-18-04)

—Tiffany Allan

HARTWELL—IWA Flashfire at the Middle School: Internet champion **Don Matthews** defeated **Tommy Sawyer** ... **Casey J** beat **The Corpse** ... **Solitude** defeated **Mack Truck** ... **Chris Vanadore** & **Big Country** beat tag team champions **Buford T** & **Tow Truck** to win the title ... **The Tower**, **Lance Christopher**, **Purple Passion** defeated **Rahn Jordan** & **James Boulevard** in a handicap match.
(12-18-04)

—Timmy Yablonski

ATLANTA—WWE Armageddon pay-per-view at the Gwinnett Center: Smackdown tag team champions **Rey Misterio Jr.** & **Rob Van Dam** defeated **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** when Van Dam pinned Dupree ... **Daniel Puder** defeated **Mike Mizanin** in a three-round *Tough Enough* "Dixie Dogfight" boxing match (the crowd got to decide the winner) ... **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Charlie Haas** & **Hardcore Holly** when **Danny Basham** pinned Holly ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Jesus** in a streetfight ... **Dawn Marie** pinned **Jackie Gayda** (**Charlie Haas** was the guest referee) ... **The Big Show** beat **Kurt Angle**, **Mark Jindrak**, & **Luther Reigns** in a handicap match when he pinned Jindrak ... **Funaki** pinned cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** to win the title ... Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** beat **Booker T**, **Eddie Guerrero**, and **The Undertaker** in a four-way match when he pinned Booker T.
(12-12-04)

—Will Welsh

MACON—WWE at the Centreplex: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** beat **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Tyson Tomko** pinned **Rhyno** ... **Simon Dean** defeated **Rosey** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Val Venis** ... **Muhammad Hassan** defeated **Tajiri** ... Women's champion **Lita** pinned **Molly Holly** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** beat **Christian** and **Maven** in a three-way match ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... **Chris Benoit** & **Randy Orton** defeated **Batista** & **Edge**.
(12-11-04)

—Anthony Allen

SAVANNAH—WWE at the Civic Center: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** defeated **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Val Venis** ... **Simon Dean** beat **Tajiri** ... **Muhammad Hassan** defeated **Rhyno** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Christian** ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **The Hurricane** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** defeated **Lita** ... **Chris Jericho** & **Randy Orton** beat **Triple-H** & **Batista**.
(12-04-04)

—Liz Hunter

AUGUSTA—WWE at the Civic Center: Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Christian** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Val Venis** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **Tajiri** ... **Muhammad Hassan** beat **Rhyno** ... Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** beat **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **The Hurricane** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** pinned **Lita** ... **Chris Benoit**, **Chris Jericho**, & **Randy Orton** beat **Triple-H**, **Edge**, & **Batista**.
(12-03-04)

—Vincent M. Harris

***"E-C-W! E-C-W!"* A very loud chant of those three famous letters rang out in the Nassau Coliseum during the Rhyno-Danny Doring bout, and both ECW alumni soaked it in for a while ... before Rhyno ultimately won with a gore.**

ILLINOIS

JERSEYVILLE—Midwest Powerhouse Wrestling at the American Legion Hall: **Mark Godeker** pinned **Tony Angel** ... **Ivan Stroganov** beat **The Midnight Mauler** ... **Christian Haze**, **Dan Walsh**, & **Curtis Payne** beat **Scar**, **The Searcher**, & **Damian Blade** ... Women's champion **Trinity** beat **Gary G** ... Co-hardcore champion **Xavier Frost** beat co-hardcore champion **Dan Walsh** in a first-blood match to gain full control of the hardcore title ... TV champ **Damian Blade** pinned **Curtis Payne** ... **Christian Haze** pinned heavyweight champion **The Searcher** to win the title.
(12-11-04)

—Chip Leffler

PINKSTAFF—National Wrestling Coalition at the Brookside Community Center: **Jaxson Pride** defeated **J.C. Michaels** ... **Carnage** beat **The Violator** ... **The Patriot** defeated **Kid Crazy** ... **George the Animal Jr.** & **George the Animal III** beat tag team champions **J.R. Hart** & **Kapone** by disqualification ... **Tommy Callaway** pinned **Shuto the Ninja** ... **Sean Chambers** won a 20-man battle royal ... **Steven Davis** & **The Intimidator** beat **Vulcan** & **Lucky Dane**.
(11-20-04)

—Brad Smithson

INDIANA

TERRE HAUTE—Crossroad Championship Wrestling at Willy Jaks: **A.J. Powers** defeated **Andrew Coal** and **Christopher Crow** ... **Kyle Cadaver** defeated **Boxcar Johnny** ... **Joe Cain** defeated **Eric Ruffington** ... **Elektra Fine** defeated **Danielle Cash** and **Jezzie Bell** to win the women's title ... **Ray Lincoln** defeated **Shawn Clarion** ... Midwest champ **Toxik** won a four-way match against **Ray Lincoln**, **Crossroad Kid**, and **Donovan Cain** ... **Colt on Cash** and **TNT** wrestled to a no-contest, leaving the heavyweight title vacant.
(12-19-04)

—Sharon Sherman

MADISON—AWA Supreme Championship Wrestling at the SCW Building: **Damien Divine** beat **Chris Blayze** ... Tag team champions **Whiplash** defeated **The Sultan** & **Malike Mahammad** ... **Blackheart I** defeated **Jamie Morrison** ... **Vito Andretti** beat **Big Gunn** ... **Apollo** pinned **Nick Noble** ... **Kliff Hanger** beat **Cody Mathews** ... **Billy Maverick** pinned **The Punisher** ... Supreme champion **The Prophet** pinned **Roger Blade**.
(12-18-04)

—Dan Semuda

VALPARAISO—IWA Mid-South Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Ryan Boz** beat **Bobby Bambino** ... **Nate Webb** beat **Josh Abercrombie** ... **Trik Davis** beat **Steve Stone** ... **Chandler McClure** beat **Brad Bradley** ... **Danny Daniels** beat **Claudio Castagnoli** ... Light heavyweight champ **Jimmy Jacobs** beat **Brandon** ... Heavyweight champion **C.M. Punk** beat **Chris Hero**.
(11-26-04)

—Barry Boone

KENTUCKY

BEDFORD—Bad 2 The Bone Wrestling at the Morgan Community Center: U.S. champion **Billy Maverick** pinned **The Punisher** ... **Billy Black** defeated **Buck Wylde** & **K.C. Sabre** in a handicap match ... **Randy Royal** beat **Colt Steele** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **J.C. Bailey** wrestled light heavyweight champion **Simon Sezz** to a double-pin ... **Vic the Bruiser** & **Randy Royal** beat **Eddie Browning** & **Colt Steele**.
(12-18-04)

—Bret Morris

JEFF—HCW Wrestling at the Whitaker Athletic Center: **Mason the Mangler** beat **Travis Blade**, **El Mexicano**, & **Cody Matthews** in a handicap match ... **Black Rain** wrestled **Ric Gunner** to a no-contest ... **Xavier Daniels** beat **Chosen One** in a loser-leaves-HCW-for-150-days match ... **Alex Walker** beat **Shawn Christopher** in a streetfight. After the match, **Walker** was tarred and feathered by **Billy Maverick** & **Xavier Daniels** ... International champion **Mike Harris** beat heavyweight champion **Billy Maverick** by disqualification in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Mike Harris** won a battle royal.
(12-11-04)

—Bret Morris

We're not sure who has the advantage at this point in this Steven Richards-Tajiri match, but we can tell you that both need to step it up a bit if they're to make an impact with Raw in the future.

ALTON—Central Wrestling Alliance at the Ruritan Club: **Redneck Superstar** & **King Paul** defeated **Big Daddy Dalton** & **Johnny Badd** ... **Raziel** wrestled **Guido** to a double-countout ... **Terry Alan** defeated **Jimmy Lamb** and **Shorty** in a three-way dance ... **Jad T. Lungini** defeated **Mongoose** ... **Tommy Green** & **Maddawg** defeated **Tony Coral** & **Diamond** ... **J-Ice** defeated **Syxe**.
(12-04-04)

—Alyssa Pack

MASSACHUSETTS

WORCESTER—WWE at the Centrum Center: **The Big Show** defeated **Kurt Angle**, **Mark Jindrak**, & **Luther Reigns** in a handicap match ... **Jesus** defeated **Charlie Haas** ... Cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** beat **Shannon Moore**, **Nunzio**, and **Funaki** in a four-way match ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** pinned **Billy Kidman** ... Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** beat **Booker T** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** & **Rob Van Dam** ... **Jackie Gayda** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Heidenreich**.
(12-04-04)

—Douglas Frentz

MICHIGAN

COLDWATER—Midwest Wrestling at the Michigan Sports Camps: **Will Reign** defeated **Noah Lott** ... **Hypknow**, **Jimmy Hollywood**, **Brian Bender**, & **David Crew** defeated **Ernie Ballz**, **Unr8ted**, **Terk Tickler**, & **Chemo** ... **Whiplash** defeated **Sonny Scarboni** & **Josh Abercrombie** ... **C.J. Otis** defeated **Frank Stein** ... **Johnny Dollar** defeated **Desmond Dukes** in a kendo stick match ... Tag team champions **Fabuzio** & **Rastakhan** defeated **Thurston Brooks** & **C-Four** ... **BAM** defeated **Jack Thriller**, **Johnny Dynamo**, and **Jayson Quick** to become the new Price of Glory Grand champion
(12-19-04)

—Dan Severn

BELLEVILLE—Border City Wrestling's "A Night Of Appreciation For Sabu" at the Diamondback Saloon: **Sharkboy** & **D-Ray 3000** defeated **Conrad Kennedy III** & **Eddie Venom** ... **A-1** defeated heavyweight champ **D-Lo Brown** to win the title ... **Monty Brown** defeated **Dallas** ... **A.J. Styles** pinned **Christopher Daniels** ... Tag team champions **Petey Williams** & **Johnny Devine** defeated **America's Most Wanted** ... **The Insane Clown Posse** & **The Rudeboy** defeated **Cpl. Robinson**, **Zach Gowen**, & **Breyer Wellington** ... **Michael Shane** defeated **Jeff Hardy** ... **Shane Douglas** pinned **Raven** (**Mick Foley** was the special referee).
(12-12-04)

—Holly Lengyel

MINNESOTA

MAPLE GROVE—Midwest Pro Wrestling at the MPW Arena: **Radian Silva** beat **The Prophet** ... **Pete Mack** beat **C.J. Talon** ... **Cody O'Neil** beat **Tad Chili** ... **Animal Sam** beat **El Veijo** ... **Rob James** & **School Boy** beat **Joessiah** & **Ben Sailor** ... **Cody O'Neil** & **Aaron Corbin** co-won a battle royal.
(12-12-04)

—Nicholas Loken

MISSOURI

OVERLAND—Gateway Championship Wrestling at the Wild Acres Gym: **Rebecca Raze** beat **Jackal** ... **Cameron Cage** beat **Richard Head** ... **Big Bad Ben** & **Dingo** beat **D.N.S.** ... **Kory Twist** & **Jynx** beat **OuTtKaSt** & **Rat Boy** ... Light heavyweight champion **Sean Vincent** beat **Dan Walsh** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **Chaz Wesson** beat **Kevin X** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Cabal** won a Gateway Rumble.
(12-10-04)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

NEW JERSEY

TOTOWA—National Wrestling Superstars at the Elks' Lodge: **J.D. Smoothy** defeated **Damian Dragon** ... **Tommy Force** pinned **Antonio Malave** ... **S. Insane** defeated **Joey Image** ... **Vicious Vin** defeated **Biggie Biggs** by disqualification ... **Chris Sandel** defeated **Little Romeo** ... **TNT** defeated **Sheik IGF Bin Rotten** ... **Nicky Oceans** defeated **Fierce Fuego** ... **The Clown** defeated **Joey the Bull**.
(12-28-04)

—Dave Wilkes

RUTHERFORD—New Millenium Wrestling Sabu tribute show at St. Mary's Gymnasium: **Johnny Thunder** beat **Crazy Ivan** ... **Danny Doring** beat **Danny Jax** ... **Scotty Charisma** beat **Matt Striker** ... **The Solution** beat **Rob Eckos** & **Billy Bax** ... **The Patriot** wrestled **Paul E. Normus** to a no-contest ... Cruiserweight champ **Qenaan Creed** beat **Johnny Thunder** ... **Chris Candido** beat **Simon Diamond** ... **Hot 'N' Sexy** beat **Mana** & **Rick Fuller** ... **Vic Divine** beat **Crowbar** to win the heavyweight title (**Mick Foley** was the guest referee) ... **Monsta Mack** beat **Genesis** ... **The Solution** beat **Hot 'N' Sexy** to win the tag team title.
(12-26-04)

—Dave Wilkes

WEST PATERSON—IWF at the IWF Arena: ***Tournament of Champions night two, quarterfinals:*** Heavyweight champion **Roman** pinned **Vik Voorhees** ... **Shane O'Brien** beat **Dan McGuire** ... American champion **Biggie Biggs** pinned **Travis Blake** ... **Fred Sampson** beat **Kevin Knight** ... ***Finals:*** Sampson won a no-disqualification four-way elimination match against O'Brien, Roman, and Biggs to capture the 2004 Tournament of Champions honor ... ***In non-tournament matches:*** **Antonio Rivera**, **Brian Harley**, & **Ricky Lopez** beat **Bobby Morrison**, **Eddie Krayz**, & **Nick Nicoletti** ... **Aaron Stride** & **Chris Steeler** defeated **Sean Royal** & **Tony Torres**.
(12-19-04)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

ELIZABETH—Fusion at the Rex Plex: **The Solution** beat **Silas Young** & **Dan Hansen** ... **Jay Lethal** beat **Ryan Drago** ... **Dan Maff** wrestled **Xavier** to a double-countout ... **New Jack** defeated **Chris Hamrick** ... **X-Pac** won a four-way match against **Sonjay Dutt**, **Chris Idol**, and **Brian XL** ... **Justin Credible** defeated **Frankie Kazarian** ... **Scott Hall** pinned **Marty Jannetty** ... **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** beat **Ultimo Dragon** & **El Fuego**.
(12-17-04)

—Mike Gaites

RAHWAY—Jersey All Pro Wrestling at the Rec Center: **The Carnage Crew** defeated **Dixie** & **Deranged** ... **Kevin Steen** beat **Sexxxy Eddie** ... **The Christopher Street Connection** beat **The Solution** to win the tag team title ... **Roderick Strong** beat **Super Dragon** ... **Azrieal** beat **Jay Lethal** to become the light heavyweight champion ... **Jack Evans** beat **El Generico** ... **Teddy Hart** beat **B-Boy** ... **Samoa Joe** wrestled heavyweight champ **Dan Maff** to a draw ... **Homicide** beat **A.J. Styles**.
(12-10-04)

—John Linaberry

MANASQUAN—National Wrestling Superstars at the Elks' Lodge: **J.T. Highlander** pinned **Steve Zapf** ... **Power Child** beat **Vic DeVine** ... **Mike Kruel** pinned **Gavin Quest** ... **Julio Dinero** & **Kara Slice** beat **Chris Candido** & **Simply Luscious** ... **Slayer** beat **Corrupted Youth** ... **Johnny Candido** beat **John B. Mahoney** in a tables match.
(12-04-04)

—Kevin Redding

NEW YORK

WEBSTER—NWA Upstate at the Ukrainian Club: **Dewey**, **John E. Blaze**, **Luis White Shoes**, **Mr. Derek Allen**, **Maximo Suave**, and **Papi Lou** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Brodie Lee** defeated **Sean Spears** ... **Ian Decay** defeated **Mr. Derek Allen** ... Tag team champions **The Olsen Twins** defeated **The Dungeon Dudes**, **J.T. Playa** & **Zachary Springate III**, and **Cheech** & **Cloudy** ... **WonderWoman** defeated **Synndy** ... Kayfabe dojo champ **Chip Stetson** beat **Evan McCloud** ... **Mean Marcos** defeated **Jake 'N' Bake** ... **Triple X**, **Spazz**, **Psykita**, & **Randy Walker** defeated **Jason Atlas**, **Eric Everlast**, **Steve Kruz**, & **Bobby Shields** ... **Kevin Dunn** defeated **D To The Icky**, **Primo Scordino**, and **Freddie Midnight** in a four-corners match ... **Robert Ezekyo** defeated **Mike Stevens** by disqualification ... **The Outcast Killaz** defeated **M-Dogg 20** & **Josh Prohibition** ... **Abyss** defeated **Scott Cardinal** ...

Heavyweight champ **Danny Doring** beat **Gabriel Saint**.
(12-18-04)

—Jessica Frangioso

NEW YORK—WWE at Madison Square Garden: Cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** beat **Shannon Moore**, **Funaki**, and **Nunzio** in a four-way match ... **The Big Show** defeated **Kurt Angle**, **Luther Reigns**, and **Mark Jindrak** in a handicap match ... **Jesus** pinned **Charlie Haas** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Billy Kidman** ... Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** defeated **Booker T** and **Eddie Guerrero** in a three-way match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** defeated **Rey Misterio Jr.** & **Rob Van Dam** ... **Jackie Gayda** defeated **Dawn Marie** ... **The Undertaker** beat **Heidenreich**.
(12-05-04)

—Darren Pennington

HUDSON FALLS—World of Hurt Wrestling at Knights of Columbus: Women's champ **Barbie** defeated **Miss DeVille** ... **Scott Scarsdale** defeated **Maxx Burton** ... **Curtis Candy** defeated **Good Lord Willing** ... **Shockwave** defeated **Reed James** ... **Steve Kruz** defeated **A.I. Takei** ... **Nick Neighborhood** & **Chuck Deep** defeated **Olaf the Belligerent Scandinavian** & **Kenny Casanova** ... **Paul E. Normous** defeated **Jimmy Jact Cash** by disqualification ... **J.P. Black** defeated **Jim Tanner** ... **Oman Tortuga** & **Diablo Santiago** defeated **Cloudy** & **Cheech** ... **Shane Alden** defeated **Swinger Sidusky** ... **Danger** defeated **Jeff Starr** ... Heavyweight champion **Texas Outlaw** defeated **Punk** and **Hoss** in a three-way hardcore match.
(12-17-04)

—Gary Kelley

SYRACUSE—WWE at the On Center: **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Billy Kidman** ... **Orlando Jordan** defeated **Nunzio** ... **Heidenreich** beat **Paul London** ... **Jackie Gayda** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** defeated **Eddie Guerrero** and **Booker T** in a three-way match ... Cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** pinned **Funaki** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** defeated **Charlie Haas** & **Hardcore Holly** ... **The Big Show**, **Rey Misterio Jr.**, & **Rob Van Dam** defeated **Kurt Angle**, **Mark Jindrak**, & **Luther Reigns**.
(11-21-04)

—Drew Murray

NORTH CAROLINA

HAMLET—World Class Extreme Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Kid Evil** and **Willy G** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Kid Evil** & **Willy G** defeated **Zane Dawson** & **Steve Michaels** ... Hardcore champion **Justin Feeche** won a four-way elimination match against **Tyrone Knox**, **Terry Dallas**, and **Damien Storm** ... **East Coast Bodily Harm** defeated **Robert Sheryl** & **Rage** ... **Tre G** defeated **Hangtime** to win the New Class title ... **Aaron Devil** & **Charlie Dreamer** defeated **DJ P. Roc** & **Dr. Love** to become the new tag team champions ... Heavyweight champ **Ali Steele** beat **Slick**.
(12-18-04)

—Linda Lapiska

ASHEVILLE—WWE at the Civic Center: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** defeated **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Val Venis** ... **Simon Dean** beat **Tajiri** ... **Muhammad Hassan** pinned **Rhyno** ... **Chris Benoit** wrestled to a double-countout with **Edge** ... **Molly Holly** defeated **Stacy Keibler** in a diva dance challenge (**Jonathan Coachman** was the judge) ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** defeated **Christian** ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Chris Jericho** & **Randy Orton** beat **Triple-H** & **Batista**.
(12-05-04)

—Billy Greenwood

RALEIGH—WWE at the Convention Center: Cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** beat **Shannon Moore**, **Chavo Guerrero Jr.**, and **Billy Kidman** in a four-way elimination match ... **The Big Show** defeated **Mark Jindrak** & **Luther Reigns** in a handicap match ... **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Paul London** & **Nunzio** ... **Jesus** pinned **Hardcore Holly** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Heidenreich** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** beat **Rob Van Dam** & **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Jackie Gayda** pinned **Dawn Marie** (**Charlie Haas** was the guest referee) ... **Booker T** & **Eddie Guerrero** beat **John Bradshaw Layfield** & **Orlando Jordan**.
(11-29-04)

—Norm Westin

OHIO

LORAIN—Mega Championship Wrestling at the Community College: **Sean Dahmer** and **Brain Klass** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Chris Kole** defeated **Spence Slater** ... **Brandon X** defeated **Christian Faith** ... **Alcatraz** defeated **Chuck Brody** ... **Stacy Hunter** defeated **Camron Star** by disqualification ... **Chuck Brody** won a 15-man battle royal ... Tag champs **Da Munchies** defeated **Bouncer** & **Sneaky Pete**, **Jabari** & **Carlton Kaz**, and **Adam Cage** & **The Fever** in a four-corners elimination match ... Light heavyweight champ **Shawn Blaze** defeated **Gabriel Knight** and **AERO** in a three-way dance ... U.S. champ **J.T. Lightning** defeated **Dean Visk**.
(12-11-04)

—Jeff Hess

SPRINGFIELD—Dayton Championship Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Johnny Walker** & **Aaron Extreme** defeated **Morris** & **T-Dogg** ... **Black Dragon** beat **Jon Austin** ... **Killa Freak Clown** pinned **Dez** ... Tag team champions **Phil Marx** & **Ganger** defeated **Lil Loco** & **Chris McGraw** ... U.S. champion **Dustin Rayz** defeated **Allen Jefferson Moore** ... **Tommy Blaze** beat **Matt Ryan** to win the TV title ... Heavyweight champion **Mr. Reality Check** beat **The Myth Mildre**.
(12-03-04)

—Troy Ford

OKLAHOMA

SAPULPA—Steel Rage Pro Wrestling at the Boys' and Girls' Club: **Chris Gazaway** & **Cade Sydal** beat **Mitch Carter** & **Dexter Hardaway** ... **Prophet** beat **Chris Kahne** ... **Bobby Burns** & **Bernard Funk** beat **Pork Chop** & **Brandon Groom** ... Hardcore champion **Bobby Dalton** won a fatal four-way match against **Shane Morbid**, **Jack Dalton**, and **Beau Dalton** ... **Harry Sanchez** beat **Adam Thornstowe** ... Heavyweight champion **Luc Lapointe** beat **Timmy J.**
(12-19-04)

—Chris Burnham

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA—Ring of Honor at the National Guard Armory: **Jimmy Jacobs** defeated **Trent Acid** ... **Deranged** & **Lacey** defeated **Angel Dust** & **Becky Bayless** ... **Homicide** defeated **Josh Daniels** ... Pure champion **John Walters** beat **Jimmy Rave** ... **Dan Maff** & **B.J. Whitmer** defeated **Loc** & **DeVito** ... **Jay Lethal** defeated **The Weapon of Mask Destruction II** ... **Steve Corino** & **C.M. Punk** defeated **Alex Shelley** & **Roderick Strong** ... **Low-Ki** wrestled **Bryan Danielson** to a no-contest ... **Austin Aries** defeated heavyweight champion **Samoa Joe** to win the title.
(12-26-04)

—Jay Skobel

PHILADELPHIA—Combat Zone Wrestling at Viking Hall: **Derek Frazier** won a two-ring battle royal ...**Kid Kamikaze** defeated **Beef** ... **All Money Is Legal** beat **Spyral**, **Heretic**, & **Ghost Shadow** ... **Roderick Strong** & **Erick Stevens** beat **Alex Shelley** & **Johnny Storm** ... **Larry Sweeney**, **Black Jack Marciano**, & **Hallowicked** beat **Mike Quackenbush**, **Jigsaw**, & **UltraMantis Black** ... **Sonjay Dutt** beat **M-Dogg 20** in a loser-leaves-CZW match ... **B-Boy** beat **Dan Maff** in the final round of the Xtreme Strong Style Tournament ... **B-Boy** beat **Chris Hero** to become the new ironman champion ... **Super Dragon** & **Excalibur** beat **Kevin Steen** & **El Generico** ... Heavyweight champ **Messiah** beat **Kaos** and **Adam Flash** in a ladders and scaffolds match ... **Sexxxy Eddy**, **Chris Cash**, **J.C. Bailey**, & **Nate Webb** beat **Ruckus**, **Sabian**, **Kingston**, &

Having just lost his Raw tag belt in November, Sylvan Grenier was eager to try on Shelton Benjamin's Intercontinental belt for size. Let's just say it was a lousy fit.

With Lita being so injury-prone, Trish Stratus could use a new foil in the women's division. Or an old foil, perhaps. Victoria would be glad to step (back) into that role.

Jack Evans in a "Cage Of Death" match ... **Justice Pain** & **W. Beater** beat **Nick Gage** & **Nate Hatred** in a "Cage Of Death" match.
(12-11-04)

—Elaine Murray

PHILADELPHIA—WWE at the Wachovia Center: **Muhammad Hassan** beat **Rhyno** ... **Chris Masters** pinned **Tajiri** ... **Simon Dean** beat **Rosey** ... **Lita** pinned **Molly Holly** ... **Gene Snitsky** defeated **Val Venis** ... Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** beat **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Edge** defeated **Chris Benoit** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Christian** ... **Chris Jericho**, **Randy Orton**, & **Maven** beat **Batista**, **Ric Flair**, & **Triple-H**.
(11-27-04)

—Steve Drew

McKEESPORT—NWA Pro Wrestling Express at the Sportatorium: Tag team champions **The Tri Chi Fraternity** defeated **Extreme** ... **Scott Venom** defeated **Eisen Drache** ... **Sebastian** defeated **Devil Bhudakahn** ... **Da Munchies** defeated **Youth Gone Wild** by disqualification... **Sully** defeated **Devin Devine** by countout... **Nikita Allanov** defeated **Adam Cage** ... **Chris Hamrick** & **Daron Smythe** defeated **Crusher Hansen** & **Jason Cage** ... **Spyral** defeated Three Rivers champion **Chris Taylor** and **Justin Idol** in a three-way elimination match to win the title.
(12-18-04)

—Jeri Jones

GILBERTSVILLE—World Wide Wrestling Alliance at Zerns Farmers Market: **Armageddon** beat **Wolfman** by countout ... **Kage** beat **New Wave** ... **Anthony Franko** beat **Shane Hagadorn** ... **Davie Andrews** beat **Nick Castle** by disqualification ... **Heartbreaker** beat **Thorn** ... **Bodacious Brad** beat **Arkham** ... Heavyweight champ **Demetrious Arion** beat **Night Prowler**.
(12-11-04)

—Dennis Tillman

WILMERDING—International Wrestling Cartel at the YMCA: **Sterling James Keenan** pinned **Brad Thomas** ... **Jason Gory** beat **Shiima Xion** ... **Jimmy Vegas** beat **Dennis Gregory** ... **Dean Radford** & **Glenn Spectre** beat **Eric Xtasy, Troy Lords**, & **J-Rocc** in a handicap match... **A.J. Styles** pinned **C.M. Punk** ... **Sterling James Keenan** beat **Petey Williams**, **John McChesney**, and **Josh Prohibition** in an elimination match to win the vacant Super Indy title ... **Bobby Eaton** & **Dennis Condrey** beat tag team champions **Tracey Smothers** & **Chris Hamrick** to win the title ... **Shirley Doe** beat heavyweight champ **Mahoney** in a street-fight to win the title.
(12-11-04)

—Joe Dombrowski

BETHLEHEM—WWE at Stabler Arena: Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** defeated **Christian** ... **Khosrow Daivari** beat **Rhyno** ... **Simon Dean** beat **Rosey** ... **Lita** beat **Molly Holly** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Tajiri** ... Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** beat **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Edge** defeated **Chris Benoit** ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **Val Venis** ... **Chris Jericho**, **Randy Orton**, & **Maven** beat **Triple-H**, **Batista**, & **Ric Flair**.
(11-28-04)

—Barry Flemming

HERSHEY—WWE at the Giant Center: **Rhyno** & **Tajiri** defeated **Khosrow Daivari** & **Muhammad Hassan** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Val Venis** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Edge** ... Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** beat **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **Rosey** ... **Lita** defeated **Molly Holly** ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **Maven** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Christian** ... **Chris Jericho** & **Randy Orton** beat **Triple-H** & **Batista**.
(11-26-04)

—Lisa McCann

READING—World Professional Wrestling at the Riverside Beneficial Association: **Vince Bono** beat **K.E. Frost** ... **Self Employed** defeated **Mista Hood** & **Braker Marian** ... **The Patriot** beat **Helter Skelter** ... **Troy Mess** defeated **The Cremator** ... **Jack Bailey** beat **Cannon Ball** ... **Steve the Teacher** beat **Flamingo Kid Pinky** ... **The Mad Russian** won a 15-man battle royal ... **Jeremy Ruinz** beat **Johnny Rokk** ... **Gemini** beat **Kage** ... **The Himalayan Players** defeated **The Mad Russian** & **Glen Osbourne**.
(11-26-04)

—Randy Barnett

RHODE ISLAND

NORTH PROVIDENCE—PWF Northeast at the Squared Circle Academy: Junior heavyweight champion **Pat Masters** defeated **Jon Thornhill** ... **Paul Lombardi** pinned **Evan Siks** ... **Triplelicious** defeated **Nat Turner** ... **Bryan** & **Matt Logan** defeated **Dan Freitas** in a handicap match ... **Ebony Blade** defeated **Matt Storm** ... Women's champion **Natalia** defeated **Ariel** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Grayson P. Alexander** won the Holiday Invitational Scramble ... **Kevin Karizma** & **Billy Black** defeated **Jose Perez** & **Jason Blade**.
(12-17-04)

—Tina Moyer

SOUTH CAROLINA

LESSLIE—Exodus Wrestling Alliance at the Elementary School Gym: **Jason King** defeated **Jason Jones** ... **Jeff Justice** defeated **The Russian Assassin** ... **Leslie Hornet** defeated **Mike Lee** and **Jesse Morris** in a three-way dance ... **Jim Heffner** defeated **Jason King** in a challenge match ... **Rick Morton** defeated **George South Sr.**
(12-09-04)

—Michael Carpenter

NORTH CHARLESTON—WWE at the Coliseum: **The Big Show** defeated **Luther Reigns** & **Mark Jindrak** in a handicap match ... Cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** beat **Billy Kidman**, **Shannon Moore**, and **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a four-way elimination match ... **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Paul London** & **Nunzio** ... **Jesus** beat **Hardcore Holly** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Heidenreich** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** beat **Rob Van Dam** & **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Jackie Gayda** pinned **Dawn Marie** (**Charlie Haas** was the guest referee) ... **Booker T** & **Eddie Guerrero** defeated **John Bradshaw Layfield** & **Orlando Jordan**.
(11-27-04)

—Larry Smith

TENNESSEE

COLUMBIA—Columbia Wrestling Alliance at Grand Slam USA: **The Psycho Medic** beat **Richard Ezell** ... **Lawrence** & **Ryder** beat **Shane** & **Bubba Morton** in a fan lumberjack strap match ... **Cat Taylor** beat **Anthony Wayne**... **Mikey Dunn** & **Ronnie Ashworth** wrestled **Southern Justice** to a no-contest in a loser-leaves-town match ... **Shane Morton** won a 20-man battle royal to win the heavyweight title.
(12-25-04)

—Lekisha F. Oliver

CHATTANOOGA—WWE at the UTC McKenzie Arena: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** defeated **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Tyson Tomko** pinned **Rhyno** ... **Chris Masters** pinned **Val Venis** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **Rosey** ... **Muhammad Hassan** beat **Tajiri** ... **Gene Snitsky** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** defeated **Christian** and **Maven** in a three-way match ... Women's champion **Lita** pinned **Molly Holly** ... **Chris Benoit** & **Randy Orton** beat **Batista** & **Edge**.
(12-12-04)

—Frank Miller

HUNTSVILLE—Southern Wrestling Alliance at Scott High School: **Omen** pinned **Eric Adamz** ... **Bad Medicine** pinned **Skull** ... Heavyweight champion **Da Studd** defeated **Jack Diamond** ... **The Hybrid Hitmen** defeated **Omen** & **Adam Antieum** ... **Skull** won a battle royal.
(12-11-04)

—Paul Ledbetter

KINGSPORT—Championship Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Bryan Wayne** defeated

The Freak ... TV champion **Thorn** defeated **Robbie Cassidy** ... Heavyweight champion **Ray Idol** defeated **Jowad Wayne** ... **Super Destroyer** defeated **Wayne Adkins** ... Tri-state champion **Josh Cody** defeated **Tony Givens** ... **Alyx Winters** and **Chris Gilbert** wrestled to a double-countout ... Junior heavyweight champion **Clay Conners** defeated **Nick Hammonds** ... **Super Destroyer**, **Josh Cody**, **Adam York**, & **Thorn** defeated **Tony Givens**, **Robbie Cassidy**, **Ray Idol**, & **Bryan Wayne** ... **Tony Givens** & **Robbie Cassidy** defeated **Super Destroyer** & **Josh Cody**.
(12-11-04)

—Frank Miller

JOHNSON CITY—WWE at Freedom Hall: Cruiserweight champion **Spike Dudley** defeated **Funaki**, **Shannon Moore**, and **Nunzio** in a four-way match ... **The Big Show** defeated **Kurt Angle**, **Luther Reigns**, & **Mark Jindrak** in a handicap match ... **Jesus** defeated **Charlie Haas** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** pinned **Billy Kidman** ... Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** beat **Eddie Guerrero** and **Booker T** in a three-way match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rene Dupree** & **Kenzo Suzuki** beat **Rob Van Dam** & **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Jackie Gayda** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Heidenreich**.
(12-06-04)

—Marcia Brunner

TEXAS

HOUSTON—WWE at the Toyota Center: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** defeated **Christian** & **Tyson Tomko** ... **Tajiri** pinned **Val Venis** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **The Hurricane** ... Women's champion **Lita** beat **Trish Stratus** ... **Muhammad Hassan** pinned **Rhyno** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** defeated **Batista** by disqualification ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Edge** in a submission match ... **Randy Orton** pinned **Triple-H**.
(12-30-04)

—Ronald Erickson

SAN ANTONIO—WWE at the SBC Center: Smackdown tag team champions **Rey Misterio Jr.** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **The Basham Brothers** ... **Rene Dupree** defeated **Paul London** ... Cruiserweight champion **Funaki** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** and **Spike Dudley** in a three-way elimination match ... **Charlie Haas** & **Hardcore Holly** beat **Mark Jindrak** & **Luther Reigns** ... **Heidenreich** pinned **Booker T** ... **Eddie Guerrero** beat **Kurt Angle** ... U.S. champion **John Cena** beat **Kenzo Suzuki** ... **Jackie Gayda** beat **Dawn Marie** in a hot body contest ... **The Big Show** defeated Smackdown champion **John Bradshaw Layfield** by disqualification.
(12-30-04)

—Chester Byrd

EL PASO—WWE at the Don Haskins Center: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** beat **Tyson Tomko** & **Christian** ... **Tajiri** pinned **Val Venis** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **The Hurricane** ... Women's champion **Lita** defeated **Trish Stratus** ... **Muhammad Hassan** pinned **Rhyno** ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **Edge** in a submission match ... **Batista** beat **Chris Jericho** in a last-man-standing match ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** beat **Gene Snitsky** and **Kane** by countout in a three-way match ... **Randy Orton** pinned **Triple-H**.
(12-29-04)

—Jason Langin

ARLINGTON—Professional Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: ***In a tournament for the vacant heavyweight title, quarterfinals:*** **Steve DeMarco** beat **B.J. Turner** ... **Dallas** beat **Jared Steele** ... **Chris Stevens** beat **John Allen** ... **Eddie Atlas** and **Mike Foxx** wrestled to a double-countout (**Hotstuff Hernandez** received a first-round bye) ... ***Semifinals:*** DeMarco beat Dallas by countout ... Hernandez beat Stevens ... ***Finals:*** DeMarco beat Hernandez to win the vacant title ... ***In non-tournament matches:*** **Kamala** beat **Action Jackson**.
(12-18-04)

—Rob Moore

TOMBALL—Texas All-Star Wrestling at Hit-A-Way Sports Arena: **Scoby Gober** beat **Nick Danial** ... **ZenZen** pinned **Dylan Star** ... **Bobby 2 Badd** beat **Chris Allen** ... Heavyweight champion **Mr. Mayhem** defeated **Bubba Lee Travis** ... Cruiserweight champion **Nark the Nevulon** beat **Justin Blaze** in a ladder match ... **Dylan Star** won am eight-man elimination match.
(12-11-04)

—Mike Garcia

VIRGINIA

CHARLOTTE COURTHOUSE—Bruiser Wrestling Federation at Central Middle School: **Matty Dee** pinned **Gregory Vercetti** ... **Ric Kelly** & **Mike Williams** beat **Hunter Guerrero** & **Bubba Studley** ... **Beef** beat **Tony Fitz** ... **Chris Collins** & **J-Money** defeated **Kamikaze Kid** & **Shawn Christian** ... **Bambi** pinned **Peggy Lee Leather** ... Heavyweight champion **Billy Gibbs** beat **Mark Fitzgerald** ... Tag team champions **Jimmy Valiant** & **Bruiser Graham** defeated **Frank Parker** & **Terry Heanan**.
(12-04-04)

—John Franklin

WISCONSIN

LUXEMBERG—ACW/NWA at the Rendeveous: **Bobby Valentino** won a battle royal ... **Dana Hilton** beat **Josie** ... **El Vato** & **Dinn T. More** beat **Mike Venom** & **Eric Priest** ... **Adrian Serrano** beat **Marco Styles** ... **Lone Wolf** beat **Logan Lasher** ... **Shane Hills**, **J-Cash**, & **Shortstack** beat **Xavier Mustafa**, **Chris Black**, & **T.C. Washington** ... **Dysfunction** wrestled to a double-disqualification with **Bobby Valentino** ... **Rob Norwood** & **Ruff Ryder Rushaan** beat **Shane Hills** & **J-Cash**.
(12-18-04)

—Nicholas Loken

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

BARRIE, ONTARIO—WWE at the Barrie Molson Centre: **Tajiri** pinned **Tyson Tomko** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **Rosey** ... **Victoria** defeated **Molly Holly** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** beat **Christian** ... Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** beat **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Edge** beat **Maven** ... **Chris Jericho** & **Randy Orton** defeated **Triple-H** & **Batista**.
(11-21-04)

—Scott Charles

KINGSTON, ONTARIO—WWE at the Memorial Civic Arena: **Tajiri** beat **Tyson Tomko** ... **Simon Dean** pinned **Rosey** ... **Victoria** beat **Molly Holly** ... **Rhyno** pinned **Jonathan Coachman** ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Christian** ... Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** defeated **Robert Conway** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Edge** pinned **Maven** ... **Chris Jericho** & **Randy Orton** defeated **Batista** & **Triple-H**.
(11-20-04)

—Dutch Krewda

PUERTO RICO

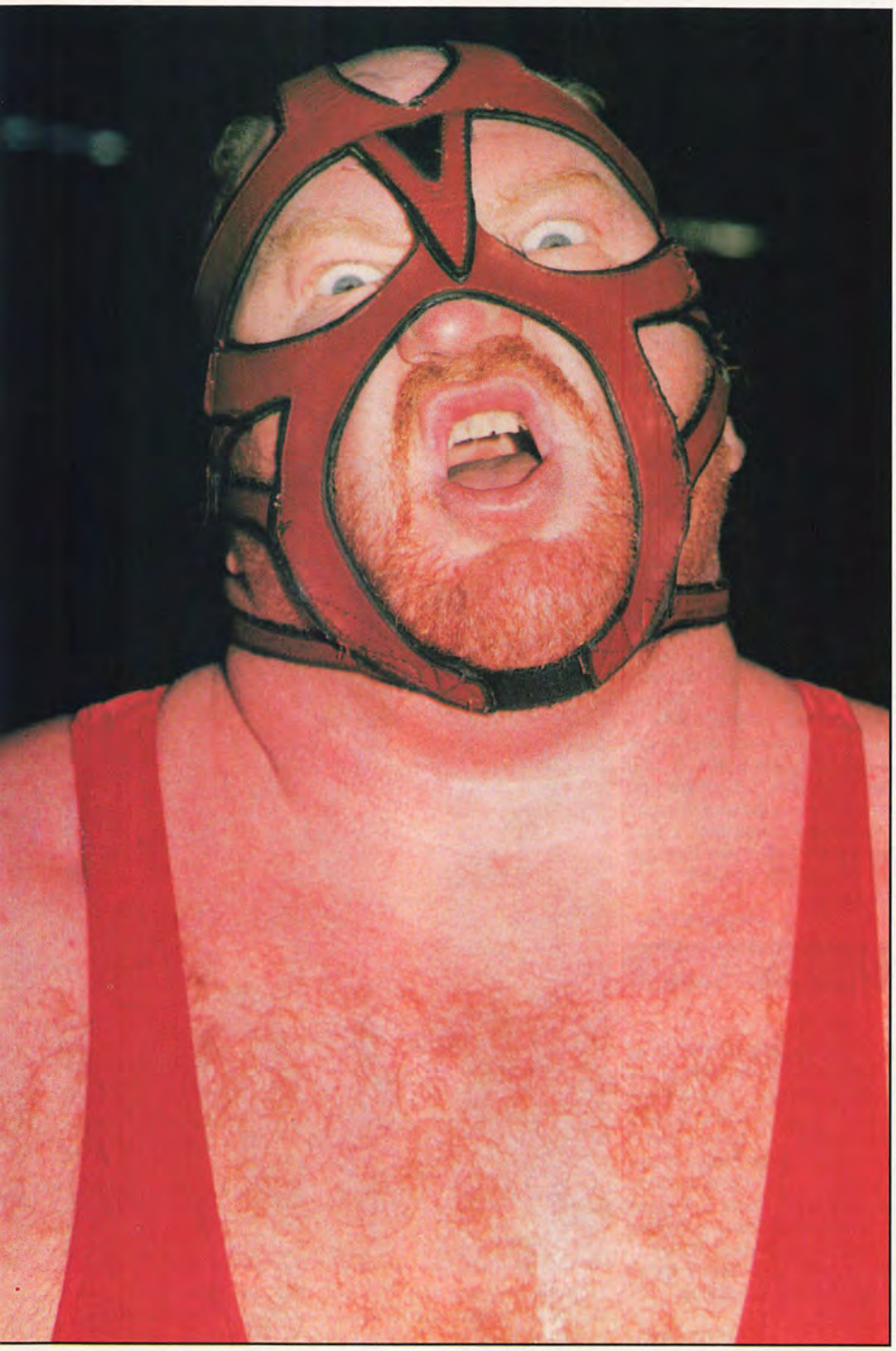
SAN JUAN—WWE New Year's Revolution pay-per-view at the Coliseo de Puerto Rico: Raw tag team champions **William Regal** & **Eugene** defeated **Christian** & **Tyson Tomko** when Eugene pinned Tomko ... **Trish Stratus** pinned women's champion **Lita** to win the title ... Intercontinental champion **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Maven** ... **Muhammad Hassan** pinned **Jerry Lawler** ... **Kane** pinned **Gene Snitsky** ... **Triple-H** won the six-way "Elimination Chamber" match, defeating (in order of elimination) **Edge**, **Chris Benoit**, **Chris Jericho**, **Batista**, and **Randy Orton** to capture the vacant Raw title (**Shawn Michaels** was the guest referee).
(01-09-05)

—Matt Brock

Triple-H brought the ring bell into the ring, but it was Randy Orton who got to use it. "The Game" never seemed to fully recover after taking a shot to the ol' coconut.

PWI classic

From the April 1995 issue of *Inside Wrestling*



SABOTAGE REVEALED!

HOW VADER DESTROYED STEVE AUSTIN'S CAREER

Big Van Vader didn't like competing for Harley Race's attention, so he devised a plot to eliminate Steve Austin. The plot worked in sickening fashion

By Dave Lenker

WATCHING THE EXACT moment, either on film or in color photographs, is so chilling and sickening that it's hard to do more than once. It's like looking at pictures of Joe Theismann lying on the ground with his leg bent the wrong way under the weight of Lawrence Taylor, or Keith Hernandez rounding second base, heading for third, and collapsing to the ground as if he had been shot by a cannonball. Or Go For Wand breaking his leg during a horse race. Or a skate blade slicing NHL goalie Clint Malarchuk's throat.

The moment. You can actually pinpoint it.

In this scene, "Stunning" Steve Austin leaps off the ring apron to deliver an elbowsmash (a move he had just executed with no problem on the *other* side of the ring) in a match against Hacksaw Duggan when, suddenly, his left knee gives

out. Duggan is lying under the ropes, his head dangling over the ring apron. A look of pain suddenly washes over Austin's face; you can almost hear the scream of agony. It's obvious from the start that something has gone very wrong; the injury is serious. Austin's leg doesn't work anymore.

Neither does Austin.

Why did it happen? Well, these things happen all the time in wrestling, in which the risk of injury is extraordinarily high.

But how did it happen? Now that's another story, one that will be revealed here for the first time. It is the story of the ultimate sabotage, a story pieced together from secondhand reports and overheard discussions. There is no paper trail to follow, nor are there any taped phone conversations.

It was the ultimate wrestling crime, carried out by wrestling's ultimate criminal: Big Van Vader. This was worse than all of the wrestlers Vader has injured in the ring, because at least Vader got Ron Simmons, Cactus Jack, Sting, Joe Thurman, and the others with his own two hands. This was scandalous.

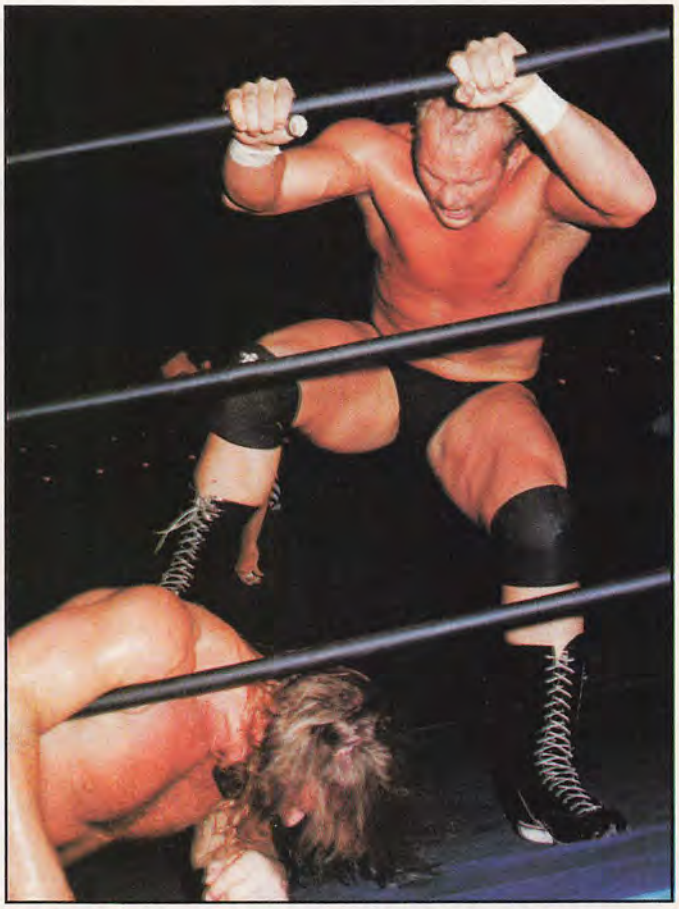
Inside Wrestling has learned that Austin's knee injury—torn ligaments—was the result of a carefully planned scheme carried out by Vader and a willing accomplice. Our investigation revealed that Vader, who was privy to the battle plan devised by Austin and Race, paid a ring attendant $10,000 to loosen the boards under the ring ropes and to remove some of the supports under the mat prior to the Austin-Duggan match. He also paid a locker room attendant $5,000 to replace the heat cream Austin usually uses prior to matches with a substitute cream that would prevent Austin's muscles from loosening properly.

In short, Vader invested $15,000 to ensure that Race would no longer be dividing his time between two men—Vader and Austin—and that other wrestlers would think twice before asking Race to manage them. Vader carried out that final part of the scheme by suggesting—but never admitting—to several wrestlers that he was the reason for Austin's injury.

Said one rulebreaker, who demanded anonymity as a condition for being interviewed: "He said something to me like, 'Watch out, or the same thing that happened to Austin might happen to you,' but he didn't elaborate. You know Vader. He just walked away."

When confronted with the results of our investigation, Vader angrily denied any involvement, threatened to sue *Inside Wrestling,* and walked away. Later, Senior Editor Bill Apter was confronted by Vader.

Steve Austin's left knee would give out just a fraction of a second after this photo was taken. His opponent, Hacksaw Duggan, had nothing to do with the injury. Big Van Vader had everything to do with it.



Austin's legs worked fine early in this fateful match. His stomps had enough power in them to keep Duggan doubled over in pain.

Inside Wrestling ratings

April 1995

WWF

World champion: Diesel

1. Razor Ramon
2. Jeff Jarrett
3. Bob Backlund
4. Davey Boy Smith
5. The Undertaker
6. Lex Luger
7. Hakushi
8. Tatanka
9. King Kong Bundy
10. Owen Hart

WCW

World champion: Hulk Hogan

1. Big Van Vader
2. Johnny B. Badd
3. Sting
4. Avalanche
5. Brutus Beefcake
6. Hacksaw Duggan
7. Dustin Rhodes
8. Lord Steven Regal
9. Bunkhouse Buck
10. Kevin Sullivan

TAG TEAMS

1. Harlem Heat
2. The Nasty Boys
3. The Rock 'n' Roll Express
4. Bob Holly & The 1-2-3 Kid
5. The Bushwhackers
6. Public Enemy
7. Bam Bam Bigelow & Tatanka
8. Marcus Bagwell & The Patriot
9. PG-13
10. The Headshrinkers

MOST POPULAR

1. Sting
2. Hulk Hogan
3. Razor Ramon
4. The Undertaker
5. Diesel
6. Randy Savage
7. Lex Luger
8. Johnny B. Badd
9. Davey Boy Smith
10. Hacksaw Duggan

MOST HATED

1. Big Van Vader
2. Bob Backlund
3. Owen Hart
4. Brutus Beefcake
5. Irwin R. Schyster
6. Avalanche
7. Tatanka
8. Kevin Sullivan
9. Jerry Lawler
10. Sid Vicious

"He told me to watch my step," Apter said. "But it wasn't what he said, it was how he said it."

Race was shocked by the results of our investigation.

"I don't believe it for a moment," Race said. "It's absolutely not true, and I'll have my lawyers on top of you if you print a word of that garbage. If Vader has a problem, he takes care of it with his own two hands. He doesn't go behind anybody's back, including mine."

Despite the threats by Vader and Race, the editors of *Inside Wrestling* chose to print this story for one very good reason: Truth is a defense against libel, and the burden of proof lies with the claimant.

Austin could not be reached for comment.

This sordid episode can be traced to November 9 at Atlanta's Center Stage Theater, when Race interfered in Austin's match against Duggan. Duggan, of course, had won the U.S. title from Austin at Fall Brawl.

"Stunning" Steve seemed confident that he'd be winning the U.S. title as he trapped Duggan in a chinlock (top) and choked him on the ropes (above). Little did he know a supposed ally was sabotaging his chances and his health!

"With Race taking care of business, I'll be able to focus on Duggan," Austin said at the time. "Race promised to get me as many title shots as I want."

That comment enraged Vader, who had been shut out from shots at the WCW World title by the Hulk Hogan-Brutus Beefcake feud and had instead focused his sights on the U.S. belt and the number-one contendership to the World belt. "Race better live up to his promises to me first," Vader screamed when he found out Austin had joined the Race camp. "I'm his number-one man."

Race responded by saying he'd get title shots for both men. That certainly didn't appease Vader, who wanted every title shot for himself. With Austin out of the picture, he had no problem getting—and winning—the U.S. title match at Starrcade in December.

"Every time Austin is in there wrestling Duggan, that's one chance taken away from me," Vader growled.

Vader knew there was no legal remedy for his problem because he hadn't signed Race to an exclusivity clause. When Race refused to budge, Vader designed his plan and began carrying it out. He had no problem finding willing accomplices; ever seen what a ring attendant makes these days? And he made sure Race had other business to take care of that night and wouldn't be in Austin's corner.

As a result, Austin's career is in serious danger. He might not wrestle for a year or longer. And Race has seen his money-making opportunities limited. No sane wrestler will go near him. According to some reports, he has approached as many as three different rulebreakers since the Austin injury took place, and not one of them was even willing to listen to his offer.

Which gives Race one other choice: dropping Vader.

Which means Race really has no choices at all. □

Inside Wrestling, April 1995

The cover: It was time for the editors of *Inside Wrestling* to seek out the resident computer geek and get him to put together a special 1995 Computer Tournament. Our supercomputer randomly matched up 16 top stars from the WWF, WCW, ECW, and Japan in four rounds of best-of-seven series until we had ourselves a winner. With victories over Bret Hart, Sid Vicious, Lex Luger, and Kevin "Diesel" Nash in the finals, our Computer Tournament champion for 1995 was ... Vader!

Tough Enough Life: It was just 10 years ago that a lot of fans were first getting to know Al Snow, even though he was a 13-year veteran already. Back then, the indy circuit standout was earning rave reviews for his early work in ECW. Our story analyzed how he was slowly "drifting toward superstardom," and featured quotes from Snow on the grueling workouts he had to endure as a young man training in various schools for a career as a wrestler.

Lex Vexed: Running into a wrestler who's angry and wants to vent usually isn't a pleasant experience, but it was an enlightening one for us when then-frustrated WWF superstar Lex Luger chose to vent to us. He discussed how angry he was that he couldn't get a shot at the WWF title, wasn't allowed to get past a blood feud with Tatanka, and couldn't shake the label of "underachiever." He made some good points, but then he never has won that title—or shook the label.

Cooling Off Big Daddy?: In putting together a short list of the men we thought had what it took to end the WWF World title reign of Diesel, we called his grip on his belt "loose." Little did we know he'd keep his grip rather firm for one very dominant year. Those we considered potential threats were The Undertaker, Lex Luger, Vader, Sting, Shawn Michaels, and ... 911. 911?! Nowhere to be found was the man who would upend him at Survivor Series 1995, Bret Hart.

Badd Intentions: Why was Johnny B. Badd eating only a carrot and watercress salad on Christmas, a day on which his mother prepared the mother of all feasts? He believed the rumors that said WCW was considering re-establishing a cruiserweight division. And he wanted to be a big part of it. Or maybe a small part of it. He wanted to lose enough weight to make sure he'd qualify. The rumors, of course, were true, but Badd (Marc Mero) left for the WWF before the division got going again.

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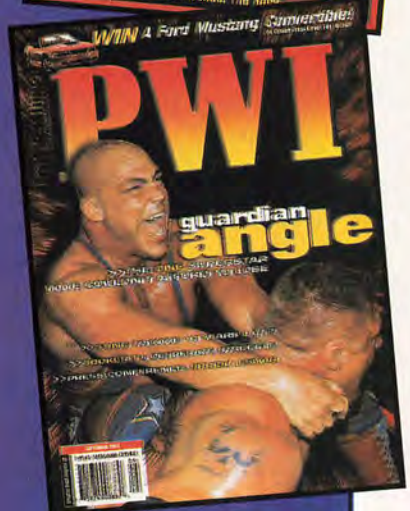

January 1990: Warrior's Next Victim: Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Ross, Midnight Express.

May 1990: Hulk Hogan: Primed And Ready For WrestleMania VI. Centerfold: Great Muta. Plus: Piper-Rude, Eric Embry, Rock 'n' Rolls, Sid Vicious, pain.

July 1990: The Maturing Of Lex Luger: The "Total Package" Becomes The People's Choice. Centerfold: Rick Martel. Plus: Skyscrapers, Bobby Heenan, Mr. Saito, referees.

September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

October 1990: Sting's Painful Lesson: You'll Have No Friends At The Top. Centerfold: Brutus Beefcake. Plus: Orndorff-Blanchard, Tugboat, Teddy Long, Ultimate Warrior, Road Warriors.

April 1991: Sgt. Slaughter Guilty Of Treason! Centerfold: Tom Zenk. Plus: Sting, Magnum T.A., Jesse Ventura, Lawler-Gilbert, Hogan & Warrior.

June 1991: Hulk Hogan: America's Hero. Centerfold: Hacksaw Duggan. Plus: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Nasty Boys, Steiners, Simmons-Reed.

July 1991: The War Is Over! Hulk Hogan Liberates The WWF Belt From Sgt. Slaughter! Centerfold: Brian Pillman. Plus: Horsemen, Lex Luger, Eric Embry, Demolition.

August 1991 (Special Issue): Supercards '91. Centerfold: Hulk Hogan. Plus: WrestleMania VII, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior, Owen Hart, Koloff-Luger.

October 1991: Sid Justice: The Second Coming Of Hulk Hogan. Centerfold: Lex Luger. Plus: Hogan-Slaughter, Terrence Taylor, Barry Windham, Williams-Bigelow.

November 1991: Your Wedding Gift For Savage & Elizabeth: Help Lift The "Macho Man's" Suspension! Centerfold: Bobby Eaton. Plus: Tito Santana, Bushwhackers, Jushin Liger, Brian Pillman.

February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

June 1992: Exclusive *PWI* Interview: Roddy Piper Speaks Out! Centerfold: Dustin Rhodes. Plus: Dangerously-Sting, Abdullah-Cactus, Sid Justice, Randy Savage.

July 1992: The Best Of The Best—The Masters Of Their Craft. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Liger-Pillman, Jim Neidhart, U.S.-Japan, Ric Flair.

September 1992: Savage vs. Sting: Why It Isn't That Unlikely. Centerfold: Nikita Koloff. Plus: Steiners, Barry Windham, Sid Justice, Hodge & Weston, Shawn Michaels.

February 1993: No One Can Cut Down Razor Ramon. Centerfold: Curt Hennig. Plus: Jake Roberts, Pillman-Dustin, Ric Flair-Road Warriors, Rick Rude, Snuka-Muraco.

May 1993: WrestleMania Without Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: The Undertaker. Plus: Ron Simmons, Cactus Jack, Madusa-Sherri, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior.

May 1996: Un-Natural! The WWF Has Finally Gone Too Far! Centerfold: Public Enemy. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn, Ric Flair, Giant.

October 1996: Peaking Too Soon: Will The Giant Be Ruined By His Own Success? Centerfold: Goldust. Plus: Big Van Vader, Ric Flair, Bulldog, Lex Luger.

February 1997: Mr. Perfect: "Shawn Michaels Stole My Life." Centerfold: "Psycho" Sid. Plus: Kroffat & Furnas, Vince McMahon, Randy Savage, New Razor & New Diesel.

February 1998: Sting vs. Hogan—The Match Of The Century! Centerfold: Hogan vs. Sting fight poster. Plus: 16-page Starrcade preview, Perry Saturn, Dude Love.

May 1998: Starrcade Scandal! We Hate To Say It … But Give The Belt Back To Hogan. Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Mero & Sable, Taz, Taka Michinoku.

June 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 *PWI* Poll. Centerfold: Steve Austin. Plus: Sabu, Lex Luger, Sting, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg.

July 1998: WWF vs. WCW: Which Is Better? Centerfold: Rocky Maivia. Plus: Benoit, Bill Goldberg, Ahmed Johnson.

October 1998: Bret Screws Bret, Part II. Centerfold: Hunter Hearst Helmsley. Plus: Jim Ross, Marcus Bagwell, WWF controversy, FBI.

Holiday 1998: *PWI* 500. Eighth Annual Special.

March 1999: 1998—The Year In Wrestling. 1998 In Review, Achievement '98 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 1999.

April 1999: The Crock! The Title Change That Screwed The World! Centerfold: Chris Jericho. Plus: Bill Goldberg, Tommy Dreamer, Booker T, more Unofficial/Officials.

May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.

June 1999: The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mankind, Flair & Turner, VMac, Steiners, New Japan-UFO.

July 1999: Warning! This Team Will Self-Destruct In 15 Seconds! Centerfold: X-Pac. Plus: New Jack-Dudleys, Jesse James, Venis & Godfather, Sting-Bischoff-Flair.

August 1999: Supercards '99: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Super 8, Bam Bam Bigelow, Jerry Lawler, tag team wrestling.

September 1999: Why Stone-Cold Might Get Out While He's Still On Top! Centerfold: Sting. Plus: Kidman & Misterio, The Rock, Bret Hart, Taz-Sabu.

October 1999: Why The World Must Fear Scott Steiner, By Buff Bagwell. Centerfold: Mankind. Plus: Kane & X-Pac, The Godfather, Perry Saturn, 20th anniversary readers' poll.

November 1999: The Women Of The WWF: There's More To Their Power Than Their Looks. Centerfold: Owen Hart. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr., Roddy Piper, Steiners, Steve Austin.

December 1999: Steve Austin: "CEO This! I'm The Damn Champ!" Centerfold: Rey Misterio Jr. Plus: Randy Savage, Jimmy Hart, WCW youth, Billy Gunn.

Holiday 1999: *PWI* 500. Ninth Annual Special.

January 2000: The Millennium Man Mouths Off! An Unforgettable Hour With Chris Jericho! Centerfold: Taz. Plus: Chris Benoit, Sid-Goldberg, Triple-H.

February 2000: The Master Manipulator! How Stone-Cold Controls The WWF. Centerfold: Kane. Plus: Paul Heyman, Hogan-Bret-Sting-Luger.

March 2000: 1999—The Year In Wrestling. 1999 In Review, Achievement '99 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2000.

April 2000: Stone-Cold vs. The Rock: Let's Settle It At WrestleMania! Centerfold: Chris Benoit. Plus: Dallas Page, Goldberg-Vicious, more Unofficial awards.

May 2000: The Y2K *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mitsuharu Misawa, Triple-H, Bret Hart, Hollys, Chyna & Asya, ECW returnees.

June 2000: Just Wondering, Steph … Is Triple-H Worth Your Billion-Dollar Inheritance? Centerfold: The Rock. Plus: Heyman-Van Dam, Vader, NWO.

July 2000: Call It A Wrap, Jack! You've Done Your Share … Go Home! Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Dusty Rhodes, Disco Inferno, DDP, Dudleys-Hardys.

August 2000: Supercards 2000: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Rob Van Dam, greatest supercards, Super 8.

September 2000: Wrestle McMania! Why The Peace Can't Last. Centerfold: Jeff Jarrett. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Dudleys, Raven.

October 2000: Scott Steiner: The Superstar The WWF Let Slip Away. Centerfold: Rikishi. Plus: Shawn Michaels, Austin-Rock, Rhino-RVD.

November 2000: The Rock vs. Triple-H. Our Special 50-Category Analysis. Pinups: Extreme wrestling. Plus: Nash-Steiner-Hall, Hardcore Holly, wrestling too extreme?

December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.

[FULL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH HOLIDAY 2000]

Holiday 2000 (116 Pages): *PWI* 500. Includes: The editors' views, a look back at 1991's top 25, Achievement 2000 ballot.

January 2001: Who Does He Really Hate? Someone Will Pay For Austin's Pain! Plus: Steven Richards, Justin Credible, Gordon Solie, Jeff Jarrett, Arn-Sid.

February 2001 (116 Pages): The State Of The Game. Includes: The states of the WWF, WCW, ECW, independents, international, the business, the art

March 2001: Hulk Hogan: WWF Fans Want Him Back! Plus: Mike Awesome, Rikishi, Jerry Lynn, Elix Skipper, Triple-H.

April 2001 (116 Pages): 2000—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2000 In Review, Achievement '00 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2001.

May 2001: The WrestleMania Curse! Will The Great One Ever Win The Big One? Plus: Vince McMahon, William Regal, Page & Nash, Ivory, Lance Storm, ECW.

June 2001 (116 Pages): The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Ric Flair, Chyna, Steve Austin.

July 2001: Women's Work! It Ain't What It Used To Be! Plus: Dudleys, Chavo Guerrero Jr., Justin Credible, Francine, Scott Steiner.

August 2001 (116 Pages): Supercards 2001: WrestleMania X-Seven, WCW Night of Champions, Super 8. Plus: Big Show, Kane, Jeff Jarrett, Tommy Dreamer.

September 2001: WWF-WCW: The 10 Questions That Must Be Answered. Plus: Triple-H, Stacy Keibler, Paul Heyman, Matt Hardy.

October 2001 (116 Pages): Mid-Year Report. Top 50 stories, grades, half-year awards, predictions. Plus: Perry Saturn, Dallas Page, Terri.

November 2001: A Crying Shane: He Paid The Price To Purchase WCW … Is He Willing To Pay The Price To Keep It? Plus: DDP-Kimberly, Edge, Molly-Spike, Tajiri, Rob Van Dam, Mick Foley, Florida indies.

December 2001 (116 Pages): *PWI* 500—Angle Climbs To The Top. Includes: The editors' views, Achievement 2001 ballot.

January 2002: There's Something About Lita—What Makes Her The WWF's "It" Girl. Plus: Jericho-Stephanie, Mark Henry, X-Pac, Triple-H, Undertaker.

February 2002 (116 Pages): The State Of The Game. Includes: The states of the WWF, independents, international, the business, the art. Plus: Goldberg.

March 2002: No More Joking, No More Choking: Y2J Takes A Serious Stab At Superstardom! Plus: Test, The Rock, Eric Bischoff, Bradshaw, Foley vs. Regal.

April 2002 (116 Pages): 2001—The Year In Wrestling. 2001 In Review, Achievement 2001 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2002.

May 2002: The Mania To End All Manias! What Will Wrestling Look Like By WrestleMania X-9? Plus: Trish Stratus, RVD, Russ Haas, Big Bossman, WWF comedy.

June 2002 (116 Pages): The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Steve Austin.

July 2002: Steph Infection! How Can Triple-H Keep His Mind On His Game? Plus: Goldust-Terri, NWO, Ron Waterman, Spike & Tazz, Jazz.

August 2002 (116 Pages): Supercards 2002: WrestleManiaX8, WWA Revolution, Super 8. Plus: X-Pac, Steve Corino, Ric Flair.

September 2002: No Rock … No Problem: The WWF Can Thrive Without The Great One. Plus: WWF draft, Billy Kidman, Sean O'Haire, Stanley Weston.

October 2002 (116 Pages): Mid-Year Report. Top 50 stories, grades, half-year awards, predictions. Plus: Lou Thesz, Francine, Edge.

November 2002: Stone-Cold Meltdown! Plus: Heyman & Lesnar, Lance Storm, NWA: TNA, DDP, A.J. Styles, Island Boys.

December 2002 (116 Pages): *PWI* 500—RVD Is No. 1. Includes: The editors' views, Achievement 2002 ballot.

January 2003: Brock Aftershock: How Lesnar Changed The Future Of WWE. Plus: Chris Benoit, Low-Ki, Jericho-Flair, Rey Misterio Jr., SummerSlam at 15.

February 2003 (116 Pages): The State Of The Game. Includes: The states of Raw, Smackdown, independents, international, the business, the art.

March 2003: Rocky Horror! He Won't Forget What You Did Last Summer. Plus: Matt Hardy, Eddie Guerrero, Bass-WWE, Victoria, WWE's next wave.

April 2003 (116 Pages): 2002—The Year In Wrestling. 2002 In Review, Achievement 2002 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2003.

May 2003 (116 Pages): The WrestleMania 100. Plus: Angle-Lesnar, Christopher Nowinski, Vince Russo, Batista & Flair.

June 2003 (116 Pages): The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr.

August 2003 (116 Pages): Goldberg: He Has WWE Caught Between The Rock And A Hard Place! Plus: WrestleMania XIX, Shawn Michaels graduates, Paul London, Raven.

September 2003 (116 Pages): Guardian Angle: The One Superstar WWE Couldn't Afford To Lose. Plus: Hurricane, Sting, Kazarian-Sabin, Jeff Jarrett, Booker T, Brock Lesnar.

October 2003 (116 Pages): Mid-Year Report. Top 50 stories, grades, half-year awards, predictions. Plus: Mick Foley.

December 2003 (116 Pages): Goldberg: Is He Getting A Bum Rap? Plus: Jeff Hardy, Mick Foley, Harris & Storm, Billy Gunn.

January 2004 (116 Pages): All Fired Up! Can Kane Blaze A Trail To The Raw Title? Plus: Christian, Cena-Gowen, Samoa Joe, Goldberg-Flair, ugliest wrestlers.

February 2004 (116 Pages): The State Of The Game. Includes: The states of Raw, Smackdown, NWA-TNA, independents, international, the business, the art.

April 2004 (116 Pages): 2003—The Year In Wrestling. 2003 In Review, Achievement 2003 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2004.

May 2004 (116 Pages): Randy Orton's Dad Speaks Out! "Ric Flair Is Gonna Ruin By Boy!" Plus: Trish Stratus, 3 Live Kru, Cena-Angle, A-Train, ROH/All-Japan, Keiji Muto, three-ways.

June 2004: Chris Benoit Wins Raw Title! Radical New Beginning For WWE! Plus: WrestleMania XX, Steve Austin, TNA women, Chavo Guerrero.

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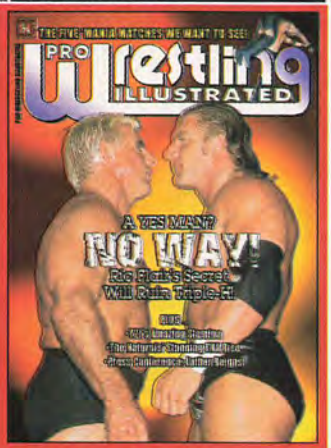
Or you can e-mail your comments to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com
Letters preceded by a ☎ indicate letters left by fans on the *PWI* Hotline (1-900-226-4PWI; see ad elsewhere in this issue).

FLAIR FOR GOLD AGAIN?



So when will it finally happen?

It seems like everyone is waiting for the moment Ric Flair turns against Triple-H and makes yet another run for the big gold belt. Sure, there have been teases, but Flair and HHH remain as tight as ever, it seems. Our February 2005 cover story examined a possible Flair master plan and wondered if the "Nature Boy" still has what it takes to be the man.

Predictably, reader opinion was split.

"Flair probably does have some plan to usurp Triple-H in the back of his mind," wrote Jesse Kyle of Hamilton, Ontario. "But I just don't believe Flair still has the physical abilities to pull it off. That's why it'll never happen."

"A serious run by Flair at the Raw title would finally make fans care about that belt again," said Peter Watson of Las Vegas. "His quest for one more run could be just like Terry Funk's reign in ECW. Everyone would be cheering for him."

"For Pete's sake, let go of the Ric Flair delusions," pleaded Simon DeMann of Irvine, California. "Flair is 20 years past his prime, and he's no match for Triple-H."

NEW LOW FOR WWE?

I am writing to express my outrage at the new characters Vince McMahon has allowed to disgrace his shows, namely Muhammad Hassan and Khosrow Daivari. I remember after the tragedy of 9/11 that Vince McMahon promised to never use anything remotely connected to the attacks in a storyline.

For the last several weeks, Hassan has mentioned the attacks, and even that Americans are prejudiced against those of Arab descent.

I have always been a proud fan of this great sport, which I like to refer to as wrestling and not "sports entertainment." I am ashamed that WWE feels it must use this hate-filled storyline to get ratings as a war rages in Iraq.

This is the most disgraceful and disrespectful thing I've seen in my 30 years of watching this sport. I will definitely forward a copy of this letter to WWE, because this needs to stop. I guess I should never have expected better from Vince; this is the same person who allowed Sgt. Slaughter to become an Iraqi sympathizer during the first Gulf War and had The Un-Americans flying our flag upside-down six months after 9/11.

I used to think Vince was a genius, but is there anything he won't do to get ratings?

JIMMY NANCE
Asheboro, NC

IMAGINE NO BOUNDARIES...

I have watched both TNA and WWE during the last year and am astonished by some of the things I've discovered. TNA has better tag team wrestling, but I'd be interested to see how the singles division matches up with WWE's.

People want to debate which promotion is better, but I feel there are great things about both. That said, my idea is this: Put on a WWE vs. TNA "Best Of The Best" joint supercard. Triple H vs. Jeff Jarrett, title vs. title. Tag team match of America's Most Wanted vs. The Dudley Boyz. Ultimate cruiserweight tournament featuring Rey Misterio vs. Petey Williams, Elix Skipper vs. Paul London, A.J. Styles vs. RVD, and Jeff Hardy vs. Billy Kidman.

Also some other dream matches I'd like to see are Rhyno vs. Monty Brown, Abyss vs. Kane, and Lita vs. Trinity. These matches and this card I've listed may not be the greatest of all-time, but the action would make fans remember why we all fell in love with wrestling.

ROBERT SCHUSCHU
superbeast3176@aol.com

YOKO IN, ULTIMO OUT?

You probably won't print this, but I have to say that the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame is as big a joke as the WWE Hall of Fame. Or really any Hall of Fame. The definition of "fame" is in the hands of the fans, not insiders. How the heck could Ultimo Dragon get in this

After seeing how the Muhammad Hassan character has been portrayed, Jimmy Nance is no longer willing to call Vince McMahon a genius. He probably has some other choice words to describe him.

year when Sting—one of the most popular wrestlers *ever*—got a measly 12 percent of the votes?

Well, you might say that wrestlers are judged on accomplishments and not necessarily "fame." Bull again. Yokozuna is neither in this Hall of Fame, nor does it appear that he has ever gotten any votes. Since his nine-month reign as WWF champion, only *one* person has held the title longer, and that was Diesel for a year. Chris Benoit, Shawn Michaels, Kurt Angle and even Steve Austin were not able to hold the belt for nine months. Neither could Bret Hart. Yet these people are in the Hall of Fame.

Yokozuna dominated the WWF in 1993. He won the Royal Rumble, beat Bret Hart for the World title, and then defeated Hulk Hogan to get the belt back. Lex Luger, Tatanka, and even The Undertaker failed to wrest the belt from him. This is also a man who risked his health to gain weight to portray a sumo wrestler. Yes, he did cheat, but so did many of the people in the Hall of Fame.

Recognize the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame as much as you want; I'm sure I'm not the only fan who feels it's a joke.

JAKE KUHN
BoiOfLife@aol.com

BLAME CREATIVE!

A response to Shaun Stirneman ("No Fan Of 'Da Man,'" October 2004): Some say Goldberg is hard to work with, but WWE should take the majority of blame for his lack of success. He was put in weak storylines, not allowed to restart the winning streak, Triple-H was pushed down our throats (still), and matchmakers couldn't give us the dream match against Austin we've wanted since 1998.

Nearly a year after he was last seen in WWE, the Goldberg debate continues. Reader D.J. Kellogg is adamant that WWE Creative and Vince McMahon, not "Da Man" himself, were most to blame for Goldberg's so-so stint in WWE.

This is not the first time WWE has mishandled new talent, though. Curt Hennig headlined for the AWA but was buried in mid-card roles. Lance Storm held the WCW U.S., hardcore, and cruiserweight titles simultaneously, but all WWE gave him was the "boring" character.

All the WWF could muster up for ex-ECW and NWA champ Terry Funk was Chainsaw Charlie! Vince says he took Goldberg to a new level? Like he took Spanky and Rey Misterio to a new level?!

How many former world champs has WWE mismanaged? Hennig, Rick Martel, Ron Garvin, Ricky Steamboat, Kerry Von Erich, Lex Luger, Faarooq, Vader, Mike Awesome, Tommy Dreamer, Justin Credible, Rhyno, and Tazz. Even Val Venis has been horribly misused for years.

Goldberg flopped for the same reasons Booker T can't call himself a six-time world champion and RVD can't even call himself a *one*-time world champion: WWE dropped the ball again.

D.J. KELLOGG
jim88z@hotmail.com

PROPS FOR TURNING POINT

I know there are haters out there who keep saying TNA is on its last legs, but I don't care.

Turning Point was far and away the best PPV event I've seen in years. It's a damn shame the event took place after the *PWI* Achievement Awards deadline passed, because Elix Skipper and Christopher Daniels against America's Most Wanted deserved Match of the Year honors, just for Skipper's incredible headscissors off the cage alone.

I'm not going to concern myself with the naysayers. Instead, I'm just going to enjoy the incredible matches TNA is putting out there and cherish them while I can.

BRIAN COOK
Tampa, FL

PWI Hotline Extra!

Your answers to our question of the week!

Question of the Week: Do you think it would be wise for WWE to resurrect ECW for one pay-per-view in 2005, or would a WWE version of ECW be destined to fail? (December 21 to 27, 2004)

Hotline callers respond: "I just finished watching *The Rise And Fall Of ECW* DVD. I hadn't realized how much I missed the ECW style," said Paul Kubiak of Akron, Ohio. "The question is whether WWE would encourage the wrestlers to use that stiff style, or whether they would tone things down like they toned down the WWE product in recent years."

"If done right, an ECW pay-per-view could be WWE's second-biggest event of the year, right behind WrestleMania," said John Curtis of Newport, Rhode Island.

"I would only support it if Paul Heyman had creative control," said Hector Montegga of Rochester, New York. "ECW is Heyman. Everything else is a knockoff."

PWI official ratings

For period ended January 14, 2005

TOP 10

1. **JOHN B. LAYFIELD**
   306, Roscoe, TX
   (3) WWE Smackdown champion
2. **TRIPLE-H**
   269, Greenwich, CT
   (1) WWE Raw champion
3. **TOSHIAKI KAWADA**
   245, Ashikaga, Japan
   (6) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
4. **RANDY ORTON**
   265, St. Louis, MO
   (4) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
5. **JEFF JARRETT**
   230, Nashville, TN
   (5) NWA heavyweight champion
6. **BATISTA**
   318, Washington, DC
   (-) No. 2 contender: WWE Raw title
7. **THE BIG SHOW**
   485, Aiken, SC
   (-) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title
8. **JOHN CENA**
   260, West Newbury, MA
   (-) WWE U.S. champion
9. **KENTA KOBASHI**
   282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
   (2) GHC heavyweight champion
10. **SHELTON BENJAMIN**
    245, Spartanburg, SC
    (10) WWE Intercontinental champion

Randy Orton

TAG TEAMS

1. **WILLIAM REGAL & EUGENE**
   Combined weight: 474 pounds
   (2) WWE Raw tag team champions
2. **THE BASHAM BROTHERS**
   Combined weight: 492 pounds
   (-) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
3. **SHINSUKE NAKAMURA & HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
   Combined weight: 477 pounds
   (-) IWGP International tag team champions
4. **BOBBY RUDE & ERIC YOUNG**
   Combined weight: 450 pounds
   (4) NWA tag team champions
5. **MITSUHARU MISAWA & YOSHINARI OGAWA**
   Combined weight: 430 pounds
   (9) GHC tag team champions
6. **REY MISTERIO JR. & ROB VAN DAM**
   Combined weight: 400 pounds
   (7) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
7. **CHRISTIAN & TYSON TOMKO**
   Combined weight: 510 pounds
   (-) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
8. **BOOKER T & EDDIE GUERRERO**
   Combined weight: 473 pounds
   (-) No. 2 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
9. **CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**
   Combined weight: 516 pounds
   (8) No. 1 contenders: NWA tag title
10. **JOEY MATTHEWS & JOHNNY NITRO**
    Combined weight: 417 pounds
    (-) OVW Southern tag team champions

WWE RAW

Raw Champion:
TRIPLE-H
(C) 269, Greenwich, CT

1. **RANDY ORTON** *(1) 265, St. Louis, MO*
2. **BATISTA** *(5) 318, Washington, DC*
3. **SHELTON BENJAMIN** *(3) 245, Spartanburg, SC*
4. **EDGE** *(4) 240, Toronto, Ontario*
5. **CHRIS BENOIT** *(2) 224, Edmonton, Alberta*
6. **SHAWN MICHAELS** *(-) 217, San Antonio, TX*
7. **KANE** *(-) 326, St. Louis, MO*
8. **CHRIS JERICHO** *(6) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba*
9. **MUHAMMAD HASSAN** *(-) 231, Syracuse, NY*
10. **GENE SNITSKY** *(7) 307, Nesquehoning, PA*

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:
JOHN B. LAYFIELD
(C) 306, Roscoe, TX

1. **THE BIG SHOW** *(6) 485, Aiken, SC*
2. **JOHN CENA** *(4) 260, West Newbury, MA*
3. **KURT ANGLE** *(5) 233, Pittsburgh, PA*
4. **THE UNDERTAKER** *(2) 304, Dallas, TX*
5. **FUNAKI** *(-) 192, Tokyo, Japan*
6. **HEIDENREICH** *(9) 275, New Orleans, LA*
7. **BOOKER T** *(1) 250, Houston, TX*
8. **REY MISTERIO JR.** *(8) 163, San Diego, CA*
9. **EDDIE GUERRERO** *(3) 223, El Paso, TX*
10. **KENZO SUZUKI** *(-) 266, Hekinan, Japan*

OVW

OVW Champion:
ELIJAH BURKE
(-) 230, Jacksonville, FL

1. **CHAD TOLAND** *(-) 228, Boston, MA*
2. **CHRIS CAGE** *(C) 220, Youngstown, OH*
3. **MATT MORGAN** *(2) 330, Fairfield, CT*
4. **KEN DOANE** *(7) 210, Louisville, KY*
5. **MATT CAPPOTELLI** *(6) 220, Norwich, NY*
6. **JOHNNY JETER** *(4) 218, San Diego, CA*
7. **JOHNNY NITRO** *(3) 204, Los Angeles, CA*
8. **SEVEN** *(9) 278, Memphis, TN*
9. **JOEY MATTHEWS** *(8) 213, Fayetteville, NC*
10. **SETH SKYFIRE** *(10) 224, Louisville, KY*

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:
AUSTIN ARIES
(3) 202, Milwaukee, WI

1. **JOHN WALTERS** *(1) 220, Boston, MA*
2. **SAMOA JOE** *(C) 270, American Samoa*
3. **COLT CABANA** *(-) 235, Chicago, IL*
4. **HOMICIDE** *(4) 220, Brooklyn, NY*
5. **C.M. PUNK** *(2) 220, Chicago, IL*
6. **BRYAN DANIELSON** *(6) 185, Aberdeen, WA*
7. **SPANKY** *(-) 212, Olympia, WA*
8. **STEVE CORINO** *(-) 230, Sea Isle City, NJ*
9. **NIGEL McGUINNESS** *(7) 220, London, England*
10. **JIMMY RAVE** *(8) 177, Atlanta, GA*

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

AWA SUPREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—The Prophet; **1**—Eric Draven; **2**—Spazz; **3**—Mason the Mangler; **4**—Vito Andretti; **5**—Billy Maverick; **6**—Live Wire; **7**—Kliff Hanger; **8**—Nick Noble; **9**—Cooter Clampette; **10**—Damien Divine.

BAD 2 THE BONE WRESTLING: Champion—J.C. Bailey; **1**—Vic the Bruiser; **2**—Simon Sezz; **3**—Billy Maverick; **4**—Randy Royal; **5**—K-Lo; **6**—Mason the Mangler; **7**—Billy Black; **8**—K.C. Sabre; **9**—Menace; **10**—Loco.

BORDER CITY WRESTLING: Champion—A-1; **1**—Tyson Dux; **2**—Alex Shelley; **3**—Chris Sabin; **4**—Geza Kalman Jr.; **5**—Dyson Pryce; **6**—Gutter; **7**—Chris Pillon; **8**—Chris Clontz; **9**—Johnny Bravo; **10**—El Reverso.

CENTRAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Terry Alan; **1**—Raziel; **2**—Tommy Green; **3**—Mongoose; **4**—Jad T. Lungini; **5**—Guido; **6**—Syxe; **7**—Redneck Superstar; **8**—Maddawg; **9**—Tony Corral; **10**—Jimmy Lamb.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—John Walters; **1**—Nick Malakai; **2**—Mike Kruel; **3**—Arch Kincaid; **4**—Mr. Ooh La La; **5**—Japanese Pool Boy; **6**—Andrew Ryker; **7**—Scotty Charisma; **8**—Shawn Patrick; **9**—Johnny Maxx; **10**—Aden Chambers.

EXODUS WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—George South Sr.; **1**—Rick Morton; **2**—Jimmy Valiant; **3**—Ethan Cage; **4**—Gladiator II; **5**—The Barbarian; **6**—Jessie Morris; **7**—Mike Lee; **8**—Jason Jones; **9**—Canadian Bulldog I; **10**—Canadian Bulldog II.

IWA FLASH FIRE: Champion—Rahn Jordan; **1**—The Tower; **2**—Lance Christopher; **3**—James Boulevard; **4**—Panhead Nelson; **5**—Phillip Pain; **6**—Mack Truck; **7**—Executioner; **8**—Solitude; **9**—Purple Passion; **10**—Casey J.

KYDA PRO WRESTLING: Champion—C.A. Elliott; **1**—Sean Patrick; **2**—Dan Severn; **3**—Tank Thomas; **4**—Shane McIntyre; **5**—Snatch Haggis; **6**—Chris Nightmare; **7**—Simply Luscious; **8**—Billy Johnson; **9**—Chucky Wynn; **10**—Joseph Brooks.

REVOLUTION CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Eric Priest; **1**—Brandon Thomaselli; **2**—Ryan Boz; **3**—Danny Daniels; **4**—Brad Bradley; **5**—Acid; **6**—Synn; **7**—Colt Cabana; **8**—Egotistico Fantastico; **9**—Eric Marx; **10**—C.M. Punk.

STEEL RAGE PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Luc Lapointe; **1**—Brandon Groom; **2**—Dexter Hardaway; **3**—The Prophet; **4**—Bobby Dalton; **5**—Timmy J; **6**—Cade Sydal; **7**—Harry Sanchez; **8**—Mitch Carter; **9**—Beau Dalton; **10**—Chris Gazaway.

TRANS-AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Bonzz; **1**—Rocky Gilmore; **2**—Mike Valentine; **3**—Josh La Rue; **4**—Dodder Green; **5**—John Deaton; **6**—Johnny Humphrey; **7**—Brandon Nichols; **8**—Jimmy Candler; **9**—Tim Johnston; **10**—Brandon Groom.

WORLD OF HURT WRESTLING: Champion—Texas Outlaw; **1**—Danger; **2**—Jeff Starr; **3**—Shockwave; **4**—Jeff Starr; **5**—Jim Tanner; **6**—Nick Neighborhood; **7**—Steve Kruz; **8**—Chuck Deep; **9**—Punk; **10**—Hoss.

NWA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN

1—JEFF HARDY
(1) 212, Cameron, NC
2—MONTY BROWN
(2) 268, Detroit, MI
3—RON KILLINGS
(3) 230, Charlotte, NC
4—SPYDER
(4) 225, New York, NY
5—VANCE NEVADA
(5) 223, Brandon, Manitoba
6—RAVEN
(7) 243, Short Hills, NJ
7—RICKY MURDOCH
(8) 261, Houston, TX
8—A.J. STYLES
(9) 202, Gainesville, GA
9—J.T. WOLFEN
(10) 297, New Haven, CT
10—JASON RUMBLE
(–) 201, Boston, MA

TNA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN

1—PETEY WILLIAMS
(1) 180, Windsor, Ontario
2—MONTY BROWN
(2) 268, Detroit, MI
3—DALLAS PAGE
(6) 256, Point Pleasant, NJ
4—A.J. STYLES
(4) 202, Gainesville, GA
5—JEFF HARDY
(3) 212, Cameron, NC
6—CHRIS SABIN
(5) 207, Hell, MI
7—KEVIN NASH
(–) 313, Detroit, MI
8—RAVEN
(9) 243, Short Hills, NJ
9—SCOTT HALL
(–) 282, Miami, FL
10—KID KASH
(–) 202, Johnson City, TN

JAPAN

1—TOSHIAKI KAWADA
(2) 245, Ashikaga, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion
2—KENTA KOBASHI
(1) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
3—HIROYOSHI TENZAN
(4) 270, Tokyo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
4—MASA CHONO
(9) 235, Tokyo, Japan
5—KEIJI MUTO
(–) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
6—KENSUKE SASAKI
(3) 251, Tokyo, Japan
7—YOSHINOBU KANEMARU
(–) 200, Yofu, Japan
8—MINORU SUZUKI
(–) 227, Yokohama, Japan
9—TIGER MASK IV
(–) 170, Uruyasu, Japan
10—YUJI NAGATA
(–) 228, Tokyo, Japan

MEXICO

1—SHOCKER
(6) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico
2—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(3) 173, Mexico City, Mexico
3—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
4—LA. PARK
(4) 235, Torreon, Mexico
5—PERRO AGUAYO JR.
(9) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico
6—NEGRO CASAS
(–) 175, Mexico City, Mexico
7—MR. NIEBLA
(–) 185, Cualtitlan, Mexico
8—DR. WAGNER JR.
(10) 215, Mexico City, Mexico
9—UNIVERSO DOS MIL
(1) 240, Mexico City, Mexico
10—REY BUCANERO
(8) 197, Mexico City, Mexico

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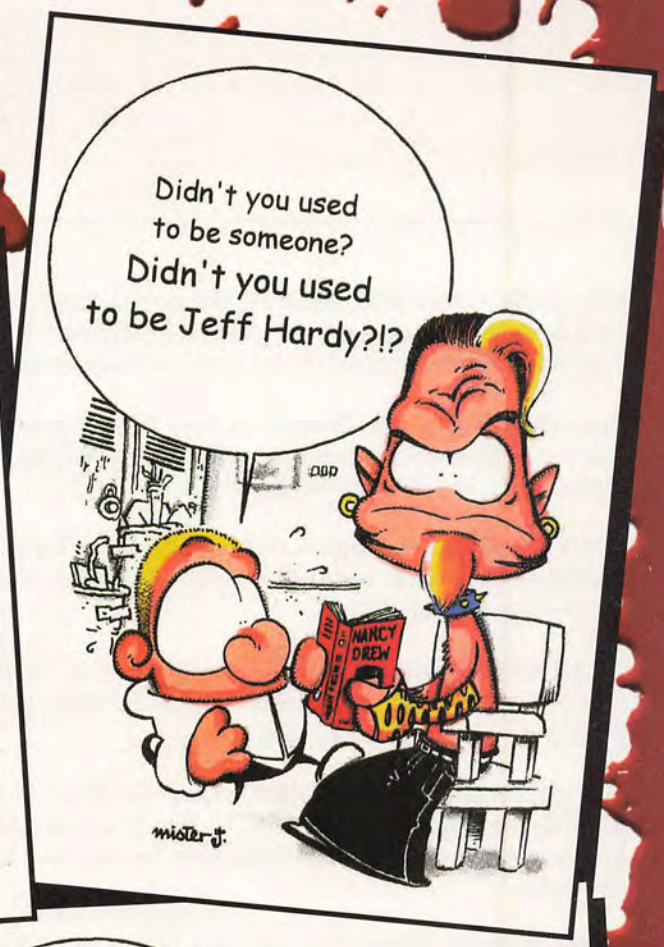
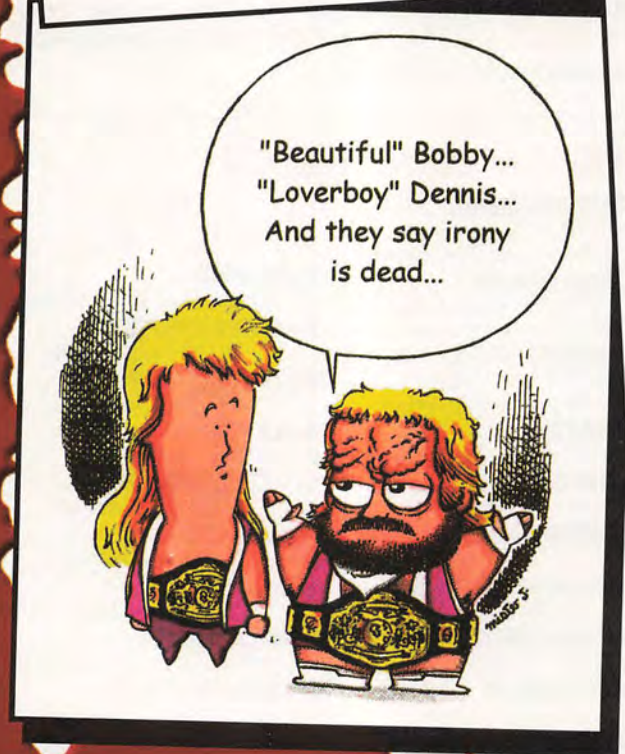
By Jason Conlan





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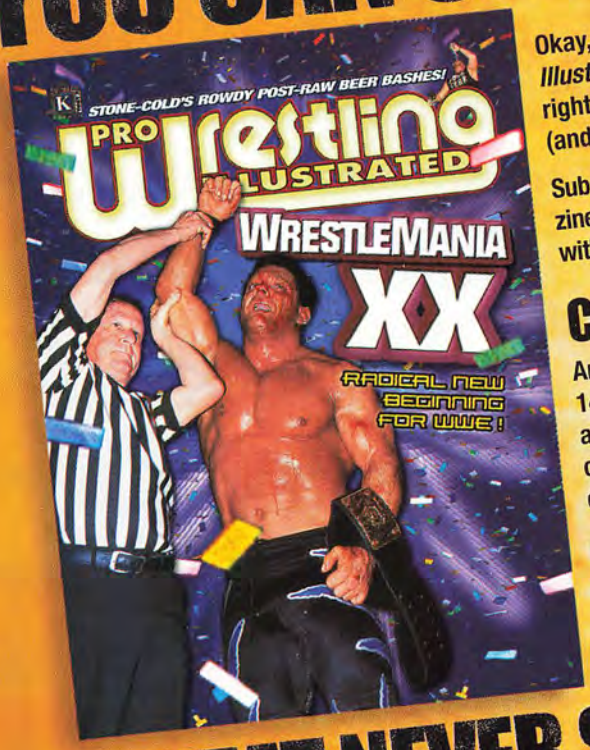

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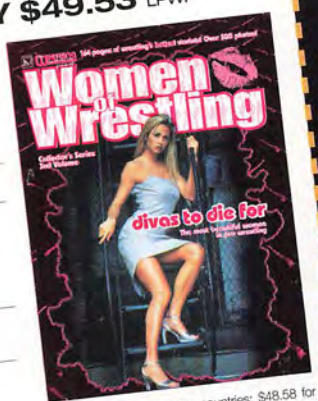

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